

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*  
**THE UNKNOWN GODDESS: POEMS**

# PORTRAITS *by* INFERENCE

H U M B E R T   W O L F E

'As small this stone, so great my love. And you  
Despite all Lethe, friend, remember too!'

GREEK ANTHOLOGY



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The book is arranged in more or less chronological order. The incidents recorded are generally accurate in fact and always, so far as the author knows, in spirit.



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# PORTRAITS BY INFERENCE



## I

## THE CANNING CLUB—OXFORD 1906

*Present*

Julian Grenfell . . .	} Balliol College
Patrick Shaw-Stewart. . .	
R. A. Knox . . .	} University College
Viscount Wolmer . . .	
Humbert Wolfe . . .	Wadham College

IT is too much to ask that I should remember in what year Lord Curzon assumed the Chancellorship of Oxford. This, like the song of the Sirens, is a secret no doubt susceptible of solution, but not by me. If it were not 1906 it may very well have been, and certainly it is not improbable that it was in that year that he came into residence—an action never before contemplated by a Chancellor. Naturally his welcome was cordial. Torchlight parades debouched before his window nightly, asking for a speech till the police, deaf to the charms of oratory, intervened. Not a Society in the University failed to invite him for a subscription, and not a few were formed with that laudable object in view. The culminating proof of the University's happiness was afforded by the bonfires kindled on Saturday evening in



the High. The civic authorities who indicated that this would impede the progress of the horse-trams were met with a short reply. In the first place, the trams never did progress and in the second the Chancellor preferred elephants. When the constabulary made their protest more than one undergraduate—not excluding the Hon. Charles Lister—gathered helmets while they might. Charles, indeed, was arrested for loitering with intent—a charge hard to rebut as at least one Inspector's cap was discovered about his person. His cause—ably argued by a largish section of the University which attended the Court for the purpose—was unfortunately damaged by the defendant's unflinching honesty. Thirty or forty were present, prepared to testify,

- (a) that he had not been present at the time;
- (b) that he was another person of the same name; and
- (c) that he had never been born.

Unhappily as they stepped forward in mass-formation the accused shouted, 'Come on, you perjurers.' This admission, coupled with the fact that he and another had recently poured hot tea out of a window in Balliol on to the head of the Dean of Trinity, predisposed the Bench against him.

All of which you may say has nothing to

do with the Canning Club, and how right you would nearly be. For how do you know that the Club was not meeting on that very night in Knox's rooms at Balliol? You do not know, but take heart! the present writer doesn't know either. It is indeed probably a fancy that the reading of a paper by Knox on 'Sherlock Holmes: the truth' was interrupted to permit of the Club issuing to quell the riot. One thing, however, cannot be denied. Julian Grenfell had a stock-whip made of rhinoceros-hide. After one or two experiences he had not unjustly been forbidden to crack it in the quad, because the structure of Balliol was admittedly faulty. It is *ex hypothesi* unlikely that he would have let this occasion pass. Law and order were threatened. Stock-whip in hand, with his tightly-curved head thrown back with the gesture of one who had been forbidden to crack a stock-whip by a cruel tyranny, he stepped out. But, as has already been reported, only Charles Lister was apprehended. And those who say that this was the evening on which a small pig, introduced in a sack, ran light-heartedly into the Senior Common Room, show themselves poor historians. Consule Curzon nobody could have carried a pig down the Broad. There wasn't room.

But for the purpose of this record we may dismiss the mob eager to do honour to their

Chancellor and return to Knox's paper. Even then this undergraduate was distinguished among men by a confusion of piety and wit. Had he not published, while still at Eton, a book of verse entitled 'Signa severa' (a quotation from Lucretius

'signa severa

Noctis')?

Did not the book contain a poem with lines not unlike the following under the (probable) title of 'Locksley Hall Revisited Again'?—

Leave me here a little, comrades. It's a habit  
I have got  
Sitting down in lonely places talking undiluted  
rot.

(Exeunt comrades hastily.)

Put me somewhere east of Suez. No I've got it  
wrong again.

It did, and Knox was a name to conjure up spirits with—even such spirits as they drank at the Canning, a dangerous brew of hot spiced beer with toast floating on its brown surface. It was after the great tankard had passed from slightly scorched hand to hand to the accompaniment of the password 'Church and State', after the churchwarden pipes had been duly lit (and broken) that Knox in the light of the single reading-lamp settled down to elucidate some of the major difficulties attaching to the Holmes canon.

You are to suppose either that the occasion was not that particular Saturday night or that the distant uproar of those ineligible for admission to the Canning Club was imperceptible. All was quiet in the room except for the occasional snapping of a pipe and the level sound of the reader's voice with its queer rising drag at the end of sentences. It was obviously a well-attended meeting, indeed more than well, beautifully attended. There were no shadows about the fated heads of Grenfell and Shaw-Stewart. With the preternatural gravity of wise youth they puffed at their pipes, waiting only for gravity to snap the long stems and not for Atropos to sever the short and brilliant thread of their destiny. Grenfell was almost certainly stretched at length on the floor, the solitary couch having been occupied by Wolmer in virtue of his office as Secretary of the Club. Possibly a shaft of light fell on the eager listening face, showing the head of a laughing discobolus on a body even in rest poised to throw.

Mr. E. B. Osborn published a book during the war on some of the loveliest and the best called 'The New Elizabethans', in which both Grenfell and Shaw-Stewart figured. He should have gone farther back in time for his parallel. These were the Athenians, cast by the hand of Praxiteles, on the eve of an expedition that was to end on a farther

shore than that of Sicily. Already, if one had had the seer's vision, one would have noted figures mutilating the Hermae. The ships were all too ready for the Western seas.

For the moment, however, it is 1906 and not 1914. Everybody is therefore attired in the following surprising uniform. They wear the roughest of tweed jackets, ornamented with immense leather buttons, folded back to display waistcoats of the most brilliant and unexpected textures. Their grey flannel trousers sag on to brogue shoes about four inches thick, useful no doubt for penetrating the thicker type of jungle, though perhaps less appropriate for progress in the High. Their throats are encompassed by that double Oxford collar which F. E. Smith wore when he delivered the speech that made him famous, and those, whose hair will permit of this, wear it parted in the middle. By the side of all of them are white woollen gloves which added the final touch of sartorial perfection. And in spite of that they fill the eye of memory.

Knox continues to read. He has reached the point in his textual criticism of Holmes where he has displayed the eight characteristics of the true as opposed to the interpolated story. The first of all is unflinching imbecility on the part of Watson. The faintest sign of human intelligence in the Dr. and the authenticity of the story is in

grave dispute. Wolmer leans forward with his square white face showing signs of theological perplexity. Is it possible, he is perhaps asking himself, that the foundations of the Church are being threatened? Knox's voice is perhaps the thin edge of the wedge—and all the blood of the Cecils begins to simmer. Grenfell and Shaw-Stewart on the other hand seem asleep, a trick common to both when closely attending. Wolfe of Wadham, on the other hand—recently (and improperly) admitted as a result of Wolmer's genius for quiet intrigue—is gazing in awed silence at Lord Tavistock's broad white tie. Splendid, he feels, to be in a room with a Marquis and two Viscounts (for Lord Maidstone is also present), but need a marquis wear a white tie with brogues?—a question which he has not yet solved, and which he propounds to some enterprising journal as the subject for a symposium.

The paper draws to an end. It has been demonstrated that not more than half of the Holmes stories are admissible. Members of the Club are busily (and secretly) writing the notes that are to form the basis of their speeches. One has already in his mind the argument which is to show that Holmes (like the comparative Homer) is not the work of one man but of a nation, supporting this by internal evidence. Another is to prove that under the thin disguise of a

detective-story the whole thing is the sun-myth, while a third is hoping to have an opportunity of illustrating his theory by dragging in a long poem which he has lately written.

The paper ends abruptly. There is some applause, a good deal of shuffling of feet, and renewed consumption of hot beer. Lord Wolmer beats on the tankard demanding silence. 'I call on Grenfell,' he says, 'to reply.' With lazy grace the speaker rises to his feet, uncurling himself like a Borzoi. Kipling said of the poem that he wrote many years later, 'His lips were touched.' His lips were smiling in 1906.

## II

### JAMES ELROY FLECKER AND THE RED-MAN

IT was Gabriel Woods who first told me that there was a poet at Trinity called John Flecker. 'They kick him about the quad a bit,' he said mildly, looking, as always, as though his namesake—the Archangel—had brought the young Shelley back, after rustication. ('Did you once see Shelley plain?' Why yes—I saw Gabriel Woods bareheaded at Bagshott when the trees, like timid bathers, seemed to shrink a little from the smooth advancing tide of the bluebells.) 'And why,' said I, 'do they kick him?' 'They have to do something with their time,' said Gabriel. 'Yes, and this man Flecker?' 'Oh, he gets on with "The Red-Man" and the *Fleurs du Mal*.' 'And what,' I inquired, 'are those?' 'Come to tea at Exeter to-morrow and he'll explain,' Gabriel replied.

Poetry was not in the ascendant at Oxford in 1904. The English School, it is true, greatly flourished under Sir Walter Raleigh, and there were some among the undergraduate population foolhardy enough to read John Masefield. But there was a



tendency to do this in secret. In public, like Kipling's heroes of the Overseas Clubs, the masculine habit was to look at the legs of a woman through the legs of a horse and no d—d nonsense about race-suicide, if you know what I mean.

It was, therefore, with some internal excitement that I climbed up the staircase in Exeter leading to Gabriel's rooms. I heard a fluent and excited voice declaiming, and melodramatically as I entered the speaker cried, 'And that is why I am a Realist.' I shall never again see such surprisingly grey eyes as those that the interrupted orator turned resentfully in my direction. In his lean and swarthy face they looked like a great painter's vivid mistake. Clearly (one felt) he ought to have toned them down, and in any case only the eyes of young men in novelettes glittered with interior illumination. The painter had overreached himself.

Flecker, standing in front of the fire-place, was anxious to continue, and barely listened when Gabriel introduced Wolfe of Wadham—with the additional information 'that he was a neo-Kantian'. 'Idealism,' said Flecker, 'is something invented to give Schiller an opportunity for making bad puns.' 'It wasn't necessary for that purpose,' I suggested. 'Then it isn't necessary at all,' said Flecker. 'When I was in Paris last January I used to

expound metaphysics to my friends from the Sorbonne. They had not heard of Kant.' 'Perhaps,' I interrupted, 'they didn't understand your pronunciation of the name.' Flecker gazed at me with cold contempt. 'I amuse my French friends,' he said, 'by imitating an English accent on occasion. Moreover, I import white Curaçao—as a business proposition.' 'He really doesn't speak French badly,' murmured Gabriel. 'Badly,' blazed Flecker. 'I am engaged upon a translation of the entire works of Paul Fort—*prince des poètes*.' 'How many poems are there?' I inquired. 'Oh,' he said carelessly, 'ten or twelve volumes.' 'And,' I inquired, 'what do you do in the intervals?' 'I am writing a play, a novel, editing a magazine, founding a Club—and naturally reading metaphysics.' 'What sort of a Club?' I asked. 'The Club,' said Flecker, 'is called "Les fleurs du mal"'. For membership moral turpitude is not necessary, though desirable; physical beauty,' he added, looking at me, 'is, however, indispensable.' I returned his gaze tranquilly and, I hope, inoffensively. Grey eyes of that particular intensity might perhaps counterbalance other disadvantages.

'What,' I asked, 'are the objects of the Club?' 'It has,' said Flecker, 'a purely Praxitelian intention. It is contemplative in character, but apart from that its outlook is

Hellenic. Indeed the purpose of the Club may be briefly set out in two lines which I have myself written, not without some pains. They are, I fancy, self-explanatory.' 'May I hear them?' 'Alas, no! Rule 29A of the Club provides that the constitution is only available to those admitted to membership. It is the oldest rule,' he added regretfully. I did not, like Alice, press to know why in these circumstances it was not Rule 1. Instead I inquired when the Club was likely to hold its first meeting. 'It has held the first meeting,' replied Flecker, 'in the course of which the following were elected permanent hon. non-members:

'Mr. Bloom of Corpus

'The Shropshire Lad

'And Plato.'

'Who is Mr. Bloom of Corpus?' I inquired. 'A practising Platonist who expounded his point of view.' 'In fact,' I said (not for the first time), 'an *experimentum in Corpore vili.*' 'I must be going,' Flecker stated decisively.

It is not surprising that some time elapsed before our next meeting. Flecker was presumably translating Paul Fort, writing his play, his novel, editing his magazine, and reading metaphysics. I, on the other hand, was re-shaping the political world. I was, for example, invited by Mr. Amery, then a Fellow of All Souls, to a luncheon with

Empire Statesmen at his college. I sat next to a small man of bubonic intensity who was, I think, called Smartt. He came from South Africa and was interested in railway development. He discussed gauges with me. 'How do the British gauges compare with the South African?' he asked in a brisk business-like voice. 'I think,' I said hesitatingly, 'that ours are deeper.' He said no more at the moment, but later we were quaffing audit ale out of the All Souls silver tumblers. He turned to me forgivingly. 'It's not my idea of a joke,' he observed, 'but I expect that you mean no harm.' I was, as you will observe, fully launched. Not only that, but I accompanied a fellow-politician to speak on the subject of Tariff Reform in a village somewhere behind Shotover. We drove out in (can it have been?) a small governess-cart at the expense of the Conservative party. The driver said that he had seen me out with the Bicester. Who was I to deny it? My companion and I addressed in turn an audience of about twelve somnolent persons in what may or may not have been a toolshed. We were heard in silence, and, if we had not spoken briefly, would certainly have been suffocated. We were taken to an ugly and uncomfortable house for tea after this exhibition. 'Madam,' said my companion to the local organizer, 'we have to keep up appearances before the electorate, but now

that we are alone let us admit that there is a certain lack of enthusiasm.' He was right. The hostess shared that feeling. We drove back slowly in a melancholy and dripping night. The horse was sulky, the driver intoxicated and forgetful of my hunting glories. My friend X was wrapped in political gloom. 'The mistake was,' he said suddenly, 'not to have brought Flecker. He would have moved them.' I put my natural sense of slight on one side. 'Flecker,' I said eagerly, 'do you know him?' 'Certainly,' replied X; 'he is a man one can use on odd jobs. In statistics, however, he is liable to be flighty.' I waived this grave and possibly unjust imputation. 'Are you a member of the *Fleurs du Mal*?—but no,' I added hurriedly looking at his face, which between the drifts of rain looked like a savage walnut. 'No, of course not.' 'I don't know,' said X haughtily, 'what the *Fleurs du Mal* may be—probably one of Flecker's more frivolous preoccupations—in which,' he added sternly, 'I would, of course, join if I had either the time or the inclination.' 'Of course,' I replied; 'but perhaps you would arrange for Flecker and me to meet on some job. We might be able to bring off something together.' 'You might,' he said. 'I'll see what I can do. And now, if you'll forgive my being frank, I should like to explain to you some of your principal

faults as a speaker.' He explained them. 'You won't forget Flecker,' I said between sneezes at the top of the Broad. 'You may count on me,' he answered magnificently. A week later I received a postcard: 'You and Flecker are to proceed to Witney to discuss organization of blanket-makers. Please call on F. at 3 The Marshes and report to me.' I went joyfully round to 3 The Marshes next afternoon. But we never reported to X, and the blanket-makers remained unorganized so far as we were concerned—which may or may not explain the growth first of Radicalism and then of Socialism in those parts.

I found Flecker in unlicensed lodgings somewhere by the remote side of an unexpected winding of the Cher. He was wearing grey flannel trousers and a whitish tennis-shirt open at the neck. His hair was ruffled, in which it resembled the table and the room. The table as to half was laid for lunch, and as to the other half was apparently laid for the Day of Judgment with foolscap, a broken bottle of Stephens' blue-black ink, books with their covers off and books lying face down in ink, and a small, rusty dagger. It was possible for a skilled tight-rope walker to get past the cushions, boots, jugs, and chairs without falling over the screen into the fire-place. I was not a skilled tight-rope walker.

The little mishap brought us together, since it is difficult to be haughty with a man whose head is resting against your fender. 'I'm sorry,' said Flecker. 'I was writing. Did you want anything?' 'A drink,' I said swaying to my feet, 'might alleviate a broken neck—or it might not.' 'We can but try,' sighed Flecker, pouring out white Curaçao into a tumbler. 'It is recommended as an *apéritif*,' he assured me. 'In this quantity?' I asked, still a little dizzy. 'Certainly,' he said firmly. 'In Paris they never drink less.' However, I was not in Paris. When Flecker left the room immediately afterwards to look for a corkscrew, I poured it out of the window. 'Good for you,' he said, looking at the empty glass. 'Now we can talk.' 'You can,' I murmured. 'I can't even move my tongue.'

'Do you know anything about poetry?' he asked, sweeping an armful of mixed papers on the floor. 'Albert Rothenstein,' I began, 'read "Dolores" to me when he was ill.' '“Dolores”!' said Flecker. 'Listen to this:

'O thou with whom I dallied  
Through all the hours of noon—  
Sweet water-boy, more pallid,  
Than any watery moon;  
Above thy body turning  
White lily-buds were strewn:  
Alas, the silver morning.  
Alas, the golden noon.'

'Why watery?' I asked. 'Because,' said Flecker, 'it was.' 'How do you mean it was?' 'Hylas,' he returned impatiently. 'It's all a water-colour. Don't you understand that you take your brush, hardly dip it in the water, feather a paint or two, and then with the lightest possible fingers mix the tones. To write a poem you ought to do finger-exercises for three hours every morning and afternoon.' 'Is it necessary to be both a painter and a pianist?' I murmured. 'You know what I mean,' said Flecker. 'Discipline—that's what every artist needs—discipline, and then discipline, and then discipline. Have some more Curaçao?' 'I'd rather wait,' I said; 'and why Narcissus? I thought that we had finished with all that.' 'So we have of course,' said Flecker; 'but you will come to understand that all subjects are alike to art. Indeed the more repulsive the matter the greater the triumph. Have you forgotten Meleager?' 'Is that a first line or a question? Because if it's a question I haven't read him. Have you?' Flecker groped in contemptuous silence through the slag-heaps on the floor. He pounced on a tattered volume and read rapidly from the VIIth Book of the Greek Anthology in the new pronunciation. 'I think,' I said, 'I could do that one.' 'Well try,' he said. 'How will this do?' I said, after grappling with Liddell and Scott:



‘Love and Timorion matched their wings and eyes,  
and that is why the god no longer flies.’

‘Not very well,’ said Flecker.

It was two or three weeks later that Albert Rothenstein magnificently descended upon me in the glory of his recent election to the New English Art Club. I felt that this was a Court card that I would play against Flecker’s acquaintance at the Sorbonne. Albert trumped everybody’s tricks. From Victor Hugo to Monet there was not a European name that did not figure in his personal acquaintance. Flecker had ventured his English-accent-in-Paris story.

‘When Will and I were walking with Fromentin in the Place Pigalle one June night,’ began Albert. Nobody dared to ask who Fromentin was, though Flecker, not wholly routed, inquired whether Albert liked the *crêpes* at the Patisserie Belge. ‘We didn’t use it,’ said Albert. Flecker gulped.

Albert lectured to us on the principles of painting. ‘Never,’ he said, ‘imagine anything. Distrust your mind. Rely on your eyes and your hands. The object; always the object.’ ‘Any object,’ said Flecker returning to the surface, ‘and no damned prettiness except to relieve the tension.’ Albert agreed. ‘Take poetry,’ said Flecker; ‘you should devote as much pains to a limerick as to an epic. Three weeks I laboured on this one

about the typical Balliol man. And,' he added, producing a mass of proofs from an under pocket with the air of one who was constantly pursued by printers' devils, 'this poem occupied nearly a week:

'M. Zola  
Would not wear a bowler  
Because he said  
It would not fit his head.'

'My friend Bentley takes about twenty minutes,' said Albert, but the proofs had overwhelmed the rest of us. 'Is that "The Red-Man"?' I asked. 'Gabriel Woods told me about it.' 'They are the galleys of the first number,' Flecker replied, fluttering over the pages and occasionally, with an exclamation, making a correction. 'It's such a bore,' he added, 'reading one's proofs.' 'Don't you take outside contributions?' somebody at last blurted out. 'We could find nothing which satisfied our standards,' Flecker assured us. 'In the next number perhaps——'

There was no next number. Either in 'The Red-Man' or immediately afterwards Flecker wrote a poem on the 'Oxford Canal'. It ended:

O strange motion in the suburb of a country  
town: slow  
regular movement of the dance of death.

Men and not phantoms are these that move in  
light.

Forgotten they live and forgotten die.

About that time too he had written of  
himself:

I am afraid to think about my death.

and again:

The young men leap, and toss their golden hair,  
Run round the land or sail across the seas:  
But one was stricken with a sore disease,—  
The lean and swarthy poet of despair.

When I heard these verses I smiled knowingly. 'Temperament and the *junge Werther*,' I agreed with X, who had found Flecker impossible politically. 'He will not come to Joseph Chamberlain's meeting in the Town Hall,' X concluded in a voice of doom. 'We must, I fear, leave him to his poems.' Little use that one Savory of Hertford should proclaim everywhere that Flecker was a genius, or that rumours should reach us of a novel *The King of Alsander*, enthusiastically advertised by one Mavrogodato. We knew better. Flecker was reading for the Student Interpretership examination. He was content to sink to be a dragoman while we dreamed of the Treasury Bench. 'In any case,' added X, 'he'll fail—and become an usher.' 'Like Verlaine in Max Beerbohm's caricature,' I thought. 'I wonder.'

Flecker did not fail, and not unnaturally he left the unsympathetic shades of Oxford to read his Arabic or Turkish or whatever it was at Cambridge. And not unnaturally from Cambridge he indited to Jack Beazly that gentle sigh of a poem to the

Gentle poet, only friend,  
From a king in banishment;

ending with a backward glance at the high days of laughter:

Floreas, amice mi!  
Floreat Praxiteles.

Oxford, on the whole, does not love her poets. In vain University College apologizes to the bright shade of Shelley with a cold marble excuse. Equally in vain for all of us, with the honourable exception of Beazly and Savory, now to proclaim acquaintance with Flecker. Cambridge that welcomed and acclaimed him owns his manuscripts by right.

I only saw him once again. I was staying in King's Parade with Morrison, who, like Flecker, had exchanged his University. 'Do you ever,' I said over our white wine and oysters, 'hear anything of that man Flecker?' 'I hardly ever hear of anything else,' said Morrison. 'Why?' I asked, expecting an epigram or a sneer. 'Because,' said Morrison, 'poetry is the fashion here, and they think

him a poet.' I felt a queer pang in my heart. Was it, could it, be possible that after all he was to cast his shoe over the Front Bench? I remembered his lines:

An Echo walked the town till late,  
And found the long streets lonely:  
At last she found a small brass plate  
Inscribed 'For Members only'.

And so she went to Parliament;  
But those ungainly men  
Woke up from sleep, and turned about  
And fell asleep again.

Had we misunderstood? Had we been blind? Was it possible that, when he wrote of death, he had written, like Keats and Shelley, in the consciousness of his own immortality? If so, what was I doing with the Bar and politics when I also once had heard, had believed, had conjectured? 'Another glass of this admirable Liebfraumilch,' some one said in a most accomplished voice. 'Rather,' I answered, but, as I drank, I sighed.

Next day I went into 'The Bull' at lunch-time to meet a politician or two with all my doubts conquered. As I went in I heard a familiar voice, saying as at the end of a fugue, to three admiring friends, 'And that is why I am not a Realist.' I saw the brilliant grey eyes for the last time. They looked at me without a flicker of recognition. I went by him to mingle with my politicians.

### III

#### THE NEW ENGLISH ART CLUB, 1908

IT might perhaps have been better to remember the New English Art Club in the winter of 1903 rather than five years later in the summer of 1908. Because, at the earlier date there brooded upon it still that Sibylline mystery with which Albert Rothenstein—youngest of its members—had endued it. How often had I not sat awe-stricken at his feet in 6 Walmer Villas, Manningham, Bradford, while he intoned the sacred and monosyllabic names of those new gods. Outside, the steam-tram puffed heartily on its commercial quests, but within Steer distantly bowed to poor belated Constable, Augustus John nodded to Gainsborough in passing, Tonks paused for an instant to instruct Sir Joshua in the principles of the art-teacher's code, and Max, above all Max, tweaked the poor little Pope's nose of the eighteenth-century poet.

Indeed it was on a charmed evening of 1903 that, at the end of my first Oxford term I escaped to 18 Fitzroy Street—almost gasping at the vicinity of the gods. Albert had two rooms—a living and (it seemed from

its general appearance) a dying room. For in the second everything was dead—the lay figure, three empty boxes of Gold Flake cigarettes, the brown broken teapot, and the pictures upside down or with their faces to the wall. But again, how wrong to make that pun, because the second was in fact not merely not dead but doubly alive. For here creation was in progress. Here Lina the flower-girl from Piccadilly Circus, duly chaperoned by her mother in a black beaded cape—had patiently endured her immortality. With her black straw hat, slightly tilted, and clutching her shawl with the air of one clutching the last straw, she had watched Albert convert her from a girl into a legend. It frightened her. It also frightened me. Nor that alone. For into this room had come, like angels with the sunset in their fists, all the great ones, and beside them Walter Sickert, Spencer Gore, J. D. Innes, Ricketts, Shannon, and, if I dared believe it, Charles Conder himself.

Not a little intoxicated, and needing no other wine than youth and the lamplit air, I accompanied Albert to Kettner's and to my initiation. Albert in retrospect looks like a figure painted by his brother Will. He seems to pause by every lamp-post to throw back his black cape under the tall French top-hat and to permit the light to pick out the stock and shirt-front. I walked, as it

were, with a series of portraits, so abashed that I must have constantly fumbled in my pocket to find the successive sixpences for admission.

We reached Kettner's, my first London restaurant, and were bowed to a table where there awaited us Walter Russell and Max Beerbohm, or as it might well have been for the effect they produced on me, Titian and Rabelais. For the first half-hour my principal difficulty was not to drown conversation by the way in which I breathed. Locomotive engines, quitting St. Pancras for the North, puffed, I thought, less vehemently. At any moment I feared one or other of the heroes would with a pitiful glance ask the waiter to lead me to the scullery. The danger passed, and I was enabled to hear what was in fact being said. You will say that I cannot remember, but you will be wrong. The conversation related to the fact that Max had been seen on the top of a bus. At first he pooh-poohed an accusation fatal to the character of a dandy and a wit. But presently he thought better of it. Well, he had mounted a bus, he admitted defiantly, and why not? Who was he to deny himself the sensation of the tumbrel? And from what other point of vantage was the popular face more successfully foreshortened. Indeed on reflection, he concluded, that in the future to complete



a gentleman's education he must take the Grand Tour on a bus, neglecting neither the sombre deeps of Mile End nor the cloistral call of farthest Highbury Barn. 'A l'autobus citoyens,' he chanted. 'Le jour de gloire est arrivé.' I laughed, God how enchanted-ly I laughed. I had been present at wit in the making, and, if perhaps it didn't sound very witty, the fault was with me. Would I not electrify the J.C.R. on my return by observing that I had positively ridden on a bus—a tumbril, my good fellows, absolutely a tumbril. At which point Mr. Beerbohm rolled tobacco inside some cartridge-shaped wafers on the table, and seriously advised the proprietor to advertize them as a *specialité de la maison*. Even then I could perceive that the proprietor was not amused.

I had to wait five years to renew my association in that great world. Albert, it is true, visited Oxford from time to time and intimidated us by his universal acquaintance with the stars. 'And did you once see Shelley plain——?' we chanted in an awed young circle. Albert smiled with weary wisdom as who should say, 'And Milton and Shakespeare, not to mention the young Achilles, whom I knew particularly well.' Nevertheless, when I became in 1908 an occupant of the attic bedroom at No. 18 I was still prepared to worship, though as a

proved metaphysician (i.e. as one who had learned Kant by heart and Aristotle by intuition) I realized that faint cynicism was the only emotion that a philosopher could permit himself.

Yet at times one was entitled to ask oneself whether Cynicism or Cynaraism was the genuine inspiration of all this creative circle so heartily sure of themselves and of one another. Walter Sickert, for example, in the days before he had become Richard, did he and Albert and (I think) Tonks not share a studio on the opposite side of Fitzroy Street where they had regular shows for those of their acquaintance with vision? Sickert was one of those rare essences who can be witty without ever actually saying an apt or surprising thing. He was, in the matter of words, like a great actor with a bad part. It mattered little how insignificant was his utterance. The manner was all. I remember, for example, one afternoon when an undistinguished Member of Parliament trundled his person through the rooms. He had come attired in frock-coat and top-hat. At the end of the visit he rescued his hat by jerking it into the air on his stick. 'Ah,' said Sickert, with the gesture that underlines the perfect word, 'you politicians learn that trick in order to cross the floor of the House.' One youngish intruder could not imagine why all the listeners were convulsed. He has since

learned that wit is for the most part in the audience and not in the speaker.

It was in the same room that a scandalized charwoman imparted the story of Augustus John and the socks. It seemed that Augustus had rented Will Rothenstein's studio in Pembroke Villas for a space. On the return of the lawful lessee there was discovered a legendary mound of socks all either minus toe or heel or both. A memory of the Swan-princesses floated through a romantic mind. Did the great Augustus foot it featly by night with shapes that slid down the moonbeams? But no! the explanation was far other. It seemed—or it was alleged—that John painted in his socks and wore out a pair a day, such in those days was his creative zeal. When it was proposed that he should have them darned he explained that, like His Gracious Majesty, he never wore a pair more than once.

Was it, I wonder, Albert or one of the older cynics who introduced me to the young man who dabbled in the arts? This one fixed me with a firm dark eye entrenched behind a bold and curving nose, and said he, 'I live in Jermyn Street.' It sounded a good thing to do: it was a good thing to do, but alas! it conveyed little to one who knew not the haunts of fashion. Nevertheless, much daunted, I leaned in this brilliant company from the window and gazed upon two

tumblers who were disporting themselves in Fitzroy Street. A little carpet was laid on the pavement and upon it a brawny fellow in a red silk vest—much be-medalled—extended himself. His lithe associate balanced himself upon the upraised hands of the recumbent hero, towering as it seemed between the hoofs of advancing horses in hansom-cabs. ‘Ah,’ said the diletante, ‘there is art—there, in fact, is the New English Art Club.’ His pupil stared in the eager hope of discovering the secret, but could see only two men endangering their lives under cab-wheels. ‘Ce n’est rien,’ he thought in the current studio French, ‘ils se font peur. C’est tout.’ But a few days later at Government Office which he adorned he received a little packet of cigarettes with a letter inviting him to a ‘convivial bite’, and suggesting that he might introduce the cigarettes to his fellow-clerks. ‘Even we artists,’ the letter said, ‘must live.’

But must they? Because at the last I remember the melodramatic circumstance of Albert, Innes, and my arm-chair. Let it be premised that at this time our material wealth did not equal our spiritual. Gillman, for example (blessed be his memory!), washed his collar once a fortnight in order to avoid wear and tear, but, to be fair, let me add only wore it once a week. Spencer Gore lived vaguely in the country, creating a

suspicion that he exchanged pictures for the vegetables that he so greenly painted. But Albert had a system. What it was I did not, and do not, know. It appeared to consist in borrowing money from himself and then repaying it to Innes, that marvellous landscape-painter. However that may have been, it afforded no excuse for concerting a plot by which Albert and Innes borrowed my arm-chair—the only object of furniture in the room, except the table and one small windsor-chair, hard as the soul of charity. One cold winter night I returned from my labours in the matter of pilotage to discover no fire and no chair. The absence of fire was the fault of Ethel, the maid, who detested me till I conciliated her by the purchase of a large Italian grass-snake. But the chair was a different and graver matter. With a hoot of rage I rushed into the studio to find Albert drawing Innes, cheerfully and (as I thought) abominably sitting in it. Followed an altercation in which I was hopelessly defeated. Was my comfort, they protested, to be measured against Art! But, said I, I pay my 15s. a week, which includes the use of the chair. Money, they said, money—and a vague sense of shame assailed me. Money—yes, that was a mistake. But nevertheless where was I to sit? That, they thought was my affair. With my ingenuity (and figure, Innes gracefully added) everything was possible.

I retreated and sat down on the windsor-chair to compose a letter of resignation, which was never delivered.

Because about a month later Innes was carried down from the chair to the great bed in Albert's room. I remember the white still face and the dark angry eyes that saw all the beauty that was to die with him. All his unborn pictures sat by his bedside, and at night they drew so close that he could hardly breathe at all. One day I found that the chair in which Albert had watched during the long nights had been put back in my room. I wished that it had never gone. How much I wished that it had not returned.

#### IV

#### JONES'S WEDDING

THERE were two Joneses, both of them fictitious and neither of them in any way connected with the other. But that is no reason why I should not use them, particularly as both illustrate the history of the Hazlitt Club. And what is the Hazlitt Club, and would it not in any case be well to permit it to follow the example of virtuous women? You shall judge.

Prof. Cooke-Wilson introduces and invents the first Mr. Jones; the Professor himself, however, calling for some introduction. He professed, then, under the cover of a long white beard, metaphysics at the University of Oxford. He was a Realist, that is to say that he was a Scot, and had a balcony constructed at his semi-detached villa to confute Idealists. His published works—during the fifty odd years of his professorship—were (but I may be wrong) a footnote on the meaning of το τι ἦν εἶναι referred to by an eminent German commentator thus: ‘ut putide scripsit Cooke-Wilson.’ His further claims to distinction—beyond the invention of Jones—were first that he umpired in a

war between sections of the Oxford University Volunteers, riding on a bicycle in a gentleman's cycling suit, and waving his white beard like the helmet of Navarre, and secondly that on being asked for a testimonial in respect of a Scholar of Wadham wrote tersely, 'I do not remember the man.' The man now (he hopes without malice) recalls himself to the Professor's lamented memory.

It was during the second term of the academic year, the one in which the Boat Race appears to be rowed, that the Professor, lecturing in the Schools, announced, by way of illustrating a syllogism, to an enraptured audience, 'The man Jones is not rowing well this year.' In that vast brain, even then perhaps occupied with the last line of the footnote, there could not have been room for the knowledge of contemporary events. He was therefore pleasantly surprised when a loud applausive clamour echoed through the hall. His eyes concealed under stalactites of eyebrow and eyelash were observed to show signs of intelligence. 'Am I after all,' perhaps he was reflecting in his Doric way, 'powpewlarr?' He wasn't. He had, however, drawn public attention in a lecture on metaphysics to the fact that the President of the O.U.B.C.—one Jones—had magnificently put himself out of the boat because he was dissatisfied with his own rowing.



This was the imaginary Jones. The actual Jones was even more so. He was, as already indicated, President of the O.U.B.C. This to an unathletic scholar of Wadham implied the following regalia: item, the right to wear on the tow-path the enormous flannel trousers of a screen cowboy; item, the obligation similarly to wear a straw-hat with a broad blue ribbon surmounting a blue blazer with the triple crown on the pocket; item, the even more dazzling permission to appear in the streets wearing the blue brass-buttoned jacket and the Leander tie of Vincent's; item, two-pennyworth of Pass Schools to balance this plenitude of sack. Or perhaps it wasn't the Pass Examiners that the hero amiably permitted to investigate his condition of mind. No doubt, in any event, theirs would have been the embarrassment and his the indulgent courtesy. 'But by all means,' his six feet of comely young manliness would observe, 'this is apparently your duty. Why you have chosen it I cannot conceive. But since it is so, do what is right, remembering only that a couple of kings and I are meditating a carriage excursion to Abingdon.' 'But certainly, Mr. Jones,' they would reply, relieved. 'If you could be persuaded now to let us know the names of the leading protagonists at the Battle of Marathon?' He could be persuaded, it seems. Because

astonishingly he appeared a year or two later at meetings of the Hazlitt Club, London. This, let it be confessed, was rather a dingy affair. Professional eminence in its earlier years is liable to give the feeling of an end of the term supper at St. Dominic's with all the prefects present, all wearing spectacles, and all desiring nothing but The Good of the School. So that when my mind reverts to many who rose to control Government Departments, Banks, or the enraptured attention of young men, I shift uneasily (and gratefully) to the man Jones and Arthur Hugh Sidgwick.

As to Jones, my actual acquaintance with him was of the slightest. Indeed after Oxford I saw him only twice, may have spoken to him for a minute, and have not the least idea to what brilliant destiny he proceeded. But the impression which he made is indelible. He was in the flesh the unrelated hero of the poem that Sidgwick was to write some years later, unrelated because in no single particular did he resemble the hero, except as being, like him, that type of young Englishman who looks always as though he were being 'chaired' after making a century. He was for me deeply significant because he typifies all that world which died with the War and, because as I look back to those two evenings at the Hazlitt Club I see the shadow begin to draw its long loop and hear the voice say:

Roll it up, whatever the cost to us.  
It is all past and nothing can better it,  
Past, incontrovertibly preterite.  
Jones is lost to us. Jones is lost to us.

I shall not pretend to chronicle those present on the first occasion when Jones loomed upon the Club. The subject of debate was (I confess it with shame) 'Dignity'. Not a few members were already acquiring some traces of it. There was, for example, the Socialist writer of the *Morning Post* die-hard leading articles. There was in him to be observed the beginning of that orotundity which was later to hoard its principles on the sideboard, like silver cups indicative of triumphs in sports no longer pursued. Downside, I am certain, was there with that harsh voice like a wandering pea escaped from a policeman's whistle, but a voice possessing authority. Nothing could exceed the distaste which Downside's speeches engendered, except perhaps their uncomfortable habit of being always intelligent and nearly always impossible to controvert. Shorter, too, I cannot imagine absent. He would get to his feet with his eyes very brightly, very resolutely, and very piercingly gazing at nothing. He would begin—such was his delivery—by creating a fear in the unaccustomed breast that he would break down. After thirty minutes there would be a fear, amounting to a deliberate certainty,

that he would not. He went from Club to Club with his soft voice like a flock of feathers that settle lightly and presently cannot be shaken off at all, so heavy their mass has become. Yes, I think that he would certainly have been there, proving that dignity was not so much an attribute as a contingent condition of external relationship, reminding his hearers of Aristotle, of Plato, of Kant, of a small relentless Niagara, whose tiny stream would never be spent. But it was, apparently, spent, because Jones arose, creating in the mind some question as to how, if he were in the room, there were place for any other. I gasped, demanding of myself what this young St. Bernard could have had in mind to come rollicking and plunging at a tabbies' tea-party. Could it be that

He had a reaction from Stubbs and beer  
And rowing and Dickens and all good cheer,  
And, finding a need for self-improvement,  
Joined the intellectual movement?

It could not be. Because Mr. Jones's speech was short, pregnant and decisive. In the recent boat-race, he observed, it would be remembered that the Cambridge boat sank, and the Oxford boat went in to the side to bail three-quarter way through the course. While the boat was near the bank a friend of No. 6 appeared on the tow-path. 'Hallo,' he said conversationally. 'Hallo,' replied

No. 6. 'How's Peter?' That, said Mr. Jones in his view, was Dignity.

The other occasion was a dinner—the last dinner—of the Club, celebrated in the premises of some unusually repulsive tavern. The chair was occupied by one chiefly remarkable for not having shaved in the last few days. With striking courage what took the place of food and wine was cheerfully consumed, though only too many faces bore the tragic sign of those destined shortly to make a speech. At least half a dozen pairs of lips would to a lip-reader have been detected in the framing of the sentence, 'And that reminds me, Mr. Chairman, of the story of the Englishman, the Scotsman and the Irishman.' The hateful messes were at last cleared away. Waiters breathed down un-receptive necks the tidings that they were 'leaving you now, sir'. The Chairman was preparing that elegant humour of the relaxed high-brow, the imitation of an india-rubber elephant wearing a bowler hat and walking the tight-rope. 'We who are gathered here, bastard devotees of a great name——' he began. He was followed, among others, by Knox, who recited an impromptu poem which among other felicities addressed the Club as 'carousers', and continued to assert that

Not in these trousers  
My Muse is wont to sing.

Another orator was reminiscently humorous in the matter of the loss of his notes in a hackney-clarence. It seemed to many present, buoyed by a half-bottle of claret at 1s. 3d. that it was all very Mermaid, not least the clothes, which, with the exception of the man Jones, were gentlemen's lounge lizard suitings. Jones, on the other hand, suffering from the belief that one dressed—and shaved—for dinner, presented three feet of white shirt and white waistcoat. He puffed a cigar and looked dubiously at me. 'Are you going to speak?' he said. 'Probably,' I answered. 'I thought, you know, of protesting against being classed with the rest as a bastard.' I laughed, expecting him to see the joke. 'Why?' inquired Jones. 'Why what?' said I somewhat surprised. 'Why are you going to say that?' 'Because,' I replied, 'it would be funny.' Jones looked round at the circle of earnest, intelligent faces, all wearing a mask of determined gaiety, like something that they had found in a Christmas cracker. 'Funny,' he said, looking at them and then at me; 'funny; it does not seem to me to be funny. It seems a pity. I'm going.' He got up, went out and did not come back. Curious! At one stage he had

Sat at their feet in proper meekness  
And learned to diagnose human weakness

And classify it in the right sub-sections  
With the appropriate cure for each;  
And utter the right kind of reflections  
At the end of somebody else's speech.

But then he had presumably gone

for an Easter walk  
And returned in deplorable disorder,  
Coarse, brutal, and only able to talk  
About the beer on the Kentish border.

'Where's Jones?' somebody asked. 'Gone,'  
I said. 'For good?' 'Yes, I think so,' I  
answered.

Martin Hall first introduced me to the Editor of the *Saturday Review* early in 1919. He bore me off—trembling with eagerness—to the St. James's Club, for me known hitherto as the venue of Max Beerbohm's cartoons. Here the legendary Marquis de Soveral had enjoyed the enthusiastic admiration of literary men in search of society. This eminent Portuguese kept the door, it seemed. I rushed in eagerly where Max had trodden with his customary reticence. I found no Marquis, but rather a small tightly buttoned man, like a very neatly tied parcel of high explosive. So far, however, from detonating in my regard he was highly amiable. Contemporary of Curzon at Balliol, and by many considered the more remarkable of the two, he accepted me without manifest disapproval. We sat in the long dining-room looking over

St. James's Park, and in the course of a long lunch-hour I explained the general labour situation in a manner calculated to discourage any student of politics, however serious. A. A. B. survived the ordeal with great, even reckless gallantry. 'Will you write that for me?' he inquired in the best Balaclava tradition. Would I write for him? Had I not waited thirty-two years for exactly those words to be spoken. Had I not in the great hall of Bradford Grammar School composed a letter to one Harold Hodge, Editor of the *Saturday Review*, beginning, 'Sir, As yet unknown I venture to address you. . . .?' Had I not considered the very words down to the last syllable in which I should respond to just such an advance? But it may be I had waited too long or I had forgotten—because all that I could find to say was, 'I should like to, Mr. Baumann,' as though Columbus should observe on seeing the incredible coast, 'Dear me, America!'

What I wrote first is of no moment or interest, except to me who had to wait for my thirties to see my first proof. To open the envelope, to extract with reverent fingers the coarse paper with the ill-printed lines, and to know that, as long as paper endures and print does not fade, your work is a part of time—is there at the first glimpse of all any sensation to match it? It is, however, so intimate, so warm a matter that it is hardly



decent to discuss it in general. Let me hurry therefore to a day in St. George's Square, where on my recovery from the influenza epidemic I opened my first parcel of review books. 'Dear Humbert,' said the accompanying letter, 'Try your hand at these. You couldn't in any case do them worse.' That I recognized was merely editorial phraseology. I brushed it eagerly on one side and tore open the parcel. It contained four or five books, but I did not burrow beyond the first. I looked at its title on the narrow white spine. It was thus inscribed: 'Jones's Wedding and Other Poems. A. H. Sidgwick.' I turned the first page. There looked at me Arthur Hugh Sidgwick who had died of wounds in France, September 17th 1917. But, I thought, how young he is, a mere boy. It can't after all be Sidgwick, because he was older than I am. Then it came to my mind that he had found a way to stabilize time.

It will, I think, be clear,

I murmured to myself,

With stars behind the four great chimneys. Dear  
In the moon, young and unchanging, they  
Will cry me welcome in the boyish way  
They had before they went to France but I,  
A boy no more, will greet them silently.

I began to turn over the pages. I had not known Sidgwick very well, but very well had

I known the days of which he wrote, which,  
as it seemed, he had died to restore to me.  
First there was Oxford in Commem as we  
had all seen, as we had all forgotten it.  
After

the strains of the band, penetrating, keen  
Like a dentist's deadly drilling-machine,  
With ever increasing sensuous suavities  
Swiftly explored our emotional cavities.

There was, was there not:

eastward far from this sordid scene  
There runs a river cool and clean,  
A river, my lad, a river. Come on!  
For the blessed river oblivion.

Nor without a reference to that time when

the eights came fleeting by  
There is a tear in the maiden's eye,  
And wafts of virginal yearnings follow  
The flashing blade of the Young Apollo.

This and the world in the mountains:

The morning drouth, the long pull-up,  
The stream and the scooping hand for a cup,  
The breeze that blew on the top of Gable,  
Wastwater stretched beneath our gaze.

. These things A. H. Sidgwick brought back  
as they had been in the days when youth  
was not a-Freud, when it was still possible  
to hear a tune without blushing and a rhyme

without throwing salt over one's left shoulder. Oh, they had gone—irretrievably. I made no bones about that. Never again will Jones—who is the other I of all our youth—

dine with us in the Strand;  
He will play no billiards with us, nor cards,  
Nor pay his shilling to sweat and stand  
For a two-hour dose at the Promenades.

Never again

Will he catch the Sunday morning train,  
To brush the dew from a Surrey field  
To startle the ducks in a Surrey pond,  
And eat his lunch in view of the Weald  
With the long line of the Downs beyond.

There was a Sunday when four of us left from Vauxhall Bridge Station for Leatherhead by the first train of all. Almost before the larks had brushed the heather from their wings we were on the steep sloping path that reaches Ranmoor Common. Perhaps it was as late as nine when we threw ourselves down in the bracken with calm faces and with hearts that overtook the wings at heaven's gate. Summer dawns return to Ranmoor. Green shine the silent chaces, deep banks the bracken, soft with eglantine whisper leaf-entangled winds. But not, it seems, for us those woods; the spell is broken. Jones is wedded elsewhere:

Heart you were never hot  
Nor large, nor full like hearts made great with shot.

He has found his quiet everlasting bridal.  
There is no way back—now or ever. It is  
over.

Which being so,  
Madam, I crave your leave to go.  
I have an important engagement with  
Robinson, and Brown and Smith.

SIR ALFRED BATEMAN AND MY  
UNCLE VITTORIO

THE messenger at No. 7 Whitehall Gardens looked like a Victorian conception of a Cabinet Minister—which was, however, counterbalanced by the fact that the prevailing Minister looked like a messenger. The room, which I nervously inhabited, continued the general deception by looking like a dropped aitch. The messenger stood primly on his two legs and, adjusting his pince-nez on their thick black ribbon, observed with an air of benevolent condescension: ‘Sir Alfred Bateman’s compliments to you, sir. And will you attend him after luncheon in the garden of the National Club.’ I showed, I believe, no external emotion at this tremendous summons. My normal visitors were members of the public looking for real officials. Their habit was to look at me with unfavourable surprise, cough, knock over my hat or a file or two, and depart. Eagerly I gazed in the hope of being consulted on bottle-nosed whales—in which I specialized—but it seemed that none cared for cetaceans. And

now I was summoned to Sir Alfred Bateman's presence—which meant that I had been appointed Secretary of an Anglo-French Committee. It meant that I had achieved an identity; it meant that I would acquire the faintly possessive air of the Private Secretary to a Great Man—and it meant shimmering in a June sunshine with the beckoning air of a dream at last accessible—Paris. I showed, however, no feeling beyond perhaps jumping up from my seat, dropping my lighted cigarette in the inkwell, and thence extracting it with my fingers. I had already the assurance of a diplomat. 'Very well,' I said, cleansing my hands and my cuffs with official blotting-paper. The messenger dropped his pince-nez. 'About 2.30—the gentlemen will be at their coffee.' 'The gentlemen?' I inquired, forgetting the need for ambassadorial reserve. 'Mr. Pelham, Mr. Dobson and Mr. Gosse usually 'as their coffee with Sir Alfred,' was the reproving reply. 'Yes, yes,' I said, hastily turning over a file and beginning to read a docket inscribed 'Ardbeach, Lord of, sturgeon and foreshore questions relating to. Part papers.' 'This is important,' I murmured. The messenger, looking unconvinced but merciful, left me alone to my abounding heart.

Sir Alfred Bateman in his youth had advanced to Whitehall Gardens on a horse, and had, it was alleged, ridden down an

unpopular Assistant Secretary. He had navigated the sewers of the Seine in the company of a Secretary to the Treasury when the negotiations for the first Anglo-French commercial treaty were greatly in progress. He had risen to control commercial treaty administration. He had even retired. He had white moustaches. He was as tall and stooping as Colonel Esmond. He was the neighbour of Lord Morley on the heights of Wimbledon. He drove with him from the station at evening in a two-horse barouche. He was not a man: he was a legend. And I was appointed his Secretary. I was his attaché. I bowed over the hand of a Marquise with a polished, though improbable, smile. 'Mais, Marquise,' I was saying, but stopped there because I could remember no more French. 'Marquise,' I repeated, and threw the sturgeon impatiently on one side. I had, as you will see, other fish to fry.

The garden of No. 1 Whitehall Gardens—home of the National Club—stretched tree-shaded down to the Thames Embankment. Here walked in postprandial leisure all those eminent in the Civil Service and letters who were enabled as a matter of conscience to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles. No such Protestants were, however, visible on that memorable afternoon. The long, narrow garden was empty, and at the far end, seated at their ease about a table, were four gentlemen

of the Victorian era speculating on the minute and timidly approaching figure of an early Georgian. They seem no further in retrospect than they appeared on that May afternoon. Closer indeed, now that I may recollect them in tranquillity and not through the confused eyes of a batsman in a nightmare walking a hundred miles under the merciless gaze of a crowd to be instantly bowled by Spooner. They sat at a wooden table with their coffee-cups at hand and puffing upon their cheroots, a little group strayed from Trollope and neatly gathered by the *Cornhill Magazine*. Trams might roar electrically beyond them on the Embankment, automobiles might trundle in the street noisily interrupting the clip-clap of hansom-cabs, but what of that? The trees threw a soft vicarage shade about them: the tall houses of Richmond Terrace had the grave and spinsterish air of old ladies of good family with cathedral connexions: time indulgently passed them on the one side.

Mr. Pelham—for so prefixed as my first Assistant Secretary he must always remain—faced me as I came with the broad forehead of a benevolent old horse accosted by a promising stable-boy. Among my limited acquaintance I claimed him to be a descendant of Newcastle—probably untruly, but at least an Earl of Chichester had distantly bequeathed his tranquil length. Sir Alfred



looked at me over his shoulder with leisurely kindness, but Mr. Austin Dobson and Mr. Edmund Gosse — like Tweedledum and Tweedledee—regarded my intrusion without satisfaction. Two neatly-buttoned little men, they seemed divided between doubt that I might know their reputations as Civil Servants and fear that I might not know their eminence as men of letters. But in fact I knew both circumstances so well that I couldn't decide whether to give them a nod of reassurance on the one count or genuflection on the other. Instead of which I imagine that I shuffled and gaped. 'This is Wolfe, Bateman,' said Mr. Pelham. 'So I imagined,' said Sir Alfred cordially, 'sit down and take your coffee with us.' 'And who,' said Mr. Edmund Gosse, 'may Mr. Wolfe be?' 'What he may be,' Sir Alfred interposed, 'I can't tell you, but what he is I can. He is my new Secretary of the Anglo-French Committee—and I like his looks.' 'Dear me,' Mr. Gosse murmured. 'Then perhaps I had better be going.' He went. I watched him mincing his way on delicate feet down the garden. I never saw him again.

Austin Dobson looked after his colleague pensively. 'Are you yourself, then,' he said, turning to me, 'a critic—or a writer? No? Then perhaps you are being successful too early as a Civil Servant. You must watch

yourself.' A happy calm, re-established itself in my fluttered spirit. 'If I were a critic,' I replied, 'I should be standing up when I speak to you, Mr. Dobson.' 'As I feared,' replied the poet, 'you are obviously a successful diplomat.' 'And now,' said Sir Alfred, 'suppose we leave the young man alone and address ourselves to our dossier. You know, Wolfe, that the meeting is in Paris—and that we leave in ten days' time.' I gasped. 'Don't you know Paris?' he asked. 'Fortunate young man! I shall be no very suitable guide. My Paris was almost pre-Haussman.' 'You can show him the way to the Foreign Office,' Mr. Pelham interposed austerely. 'That and his hotel will serve his turn.' 'Ah, yes,' said Sir Alfred, 'and talking of hotels, I think we will descend at the Vouillemont in the Rue Boissy d'Anglas. It is near the Embassy and preserves its courtyard intact. We can take our little breakfasts on the terrace, and all our rooms of state will be heavily gilded. You'll arrange that, Wolfe?' Would I arrange it! As though I had been asked to take lodgings just the other side of the Heavenly Gate! I murmured something beneath my breath. 'Good,' said Sir Alfred. 'Well, now, could you and I look over the papers, and to-morrow we can confer with the Elder Brother of Trinity House and the Younger Brother of a Permanent Secretary who

surprisingly has received a well-merited appointment as Professional Adviser on Marine Affairs.'

'That,' said Sir Alfred, watching my eyes with gentle envy, 'is the *Sacré Cœur*. In spite of Pelham you shall be let out one night to stand on the terrace and see tout Paris at your feet. You may even go alone.' 'I have an uncle in Paris,' I replied inconsequently, beginning to take the heavy bags down from the deep loose racks. 'I expect that he'll show me the way.' 'An uncle?' said Sir Alfred—'and you have waited till you arrive at the Gare du Nord to invent him. I should have thought that he would have occurred to you at Dover.' 'But,' I assured him, resolute and red with exertion, as the train puffed into the platform, 'but I have. His name is Vittorio Terracini. He has written to my aunt Rosetta. He is coming to the hotel to fetch me. You shall see him.' 'Good,' said Sir Alfred, 'I look forward to the sight, and now would it embarrass you if we descended? The train after all has arrived.'

It was not till the fourth day of our Conference that the pale oval face with the surprised cavalry moustaches of my uncle. Vittorio manifested itself. It seemed to me that I had lived four multitudinous years. I had experienced what to-day we should call

the scenario of a film—one of those gallant films with uniformed ambassadors quietly moulding empires with an elegant flick of negligent fingers. There was first the Quai d'Orsay and the speech of welcome from the duly red-rosetted Under-Secretary. He stood rotund and upright at the end of the table in the great room, graciously permitting the sun to gild his periods. 'Messieurs, au nom du Président de la République,' he began. The words were as memorable as a Shakespearian prologue. They stayed on the air, being in no hurry to dissipate their graceful entities. I clutched each one as it passed me with eager solicitude, tasted it, held it and let it go, swearing to remember. That is an oath that I have not broken.

We settled down with our colleagues—or rather Sir Alfred's colleagues—to the table and to work. Who were those eminent French gentlemen? Only two remain in my memory; the first, I fear, for a charming and faintly improper reason. This was a tall full-bodied man with a grave and inquiring manner. He was taller and broader than any of the English, and rudely shocked insular preconceptions of French physique. He suggested the impression of holding himself against the wind while he gave the wheel the requisite turn. He was a Deputy for a maritime constituency, and he was, so we were told later with sly gaiety, Maire

d'Œux. 'Vous avez compris n'est-ce pas, Maire d'Œux—c'est à dire espèce de jeu sur les mots. Il y a chez nous un mot un peu grossier.' Sir Alfred understood and laughed amiably. Naturally with these qualifications the Deputy was unanimously elected Chairman.

The other figure that I recall is that of M. Fromageot, destined to achieve fame as one of the first of international jurists. On this occasion he was making an early experience of the strange island-race—those agreeable geese who, at the most unexpected moment, stretch out their long necks and strike with beaks like the point of a spear. His expositions were like light falling through plate-glass, so clear, so swift and so confident. Even Sir Alfred's happy hesitations seemed powerless to interrupt or avert this skilful torrent. Hastily, and as best I could, I noted, and scribbled suggested replies which I pushed under Sir Alfred's blotter—where they remained unread. M. Fromageot finished. The Chairman took the word and spoke, if not from the heart, at least from the chest. I trembled inwardly. We were not merely defeated: we were routed. The Chairman reached his conclusion and invited Sir Alfred to reply. 'I think,' he said, 'as my colleagues are not altogether familiar with French, it would perhaps be well to adjourn in order to enable us to study the

*procès-verbal* which the Secretaries could prepare.' What statesmanship! I breathed again and looked covertly to see how the Frenchman would take the counter-move. The Chairman inclined his head. 'But naturally—and may we meet at four—if that is convenient? It will give us time also to eat at Voisin—where I think you have promised to come?' We rose. I had seen diplomacy. I was to prepare not minutes but a *procès-verbal*. Sir Alfred had met the French rapiers with a turn of the wrist. The sun was shining. Pippa had passed and God was in His heaven.

I do not, alas! remember the name of my French fellow-Secretary, but his passion and his aptitudes I well remember. He conducted me along the corridors of the Foreign Office, hissing faintly. This sound did not, as I supposed, indicate contempt, but only a tendency to asthma. He was attaché in rank, but he looked more like an attaché-case. Nothing of Eton and brilliant vacuity here; no neat trousers, no significant tie. But only the outward appearance of a small burgher on his way to a family cooking. He settled down to the *procès-verbal* as to a ledger. 'Hold,' he said, and scribbled industriously for twenty minutes. He handed me his effort. My opinion of foreign diplomacy rose. 'It is astonishing,' I said. 'Ah,' he said, agreeably surprised, 'it is nothing.'

'Far from it,' I said earnestly; 'it is everything—except what happened.' 'But hold,' he said; 'you dispute it?' 'This,' I said regretfully, 'is what I have written.' We compared notes. We differed, we crossed out and crossed in. We reached a transaction about 3 o'clock. 'I make you my compliments,' he said. 'Did you observe Leblanc?' 'No,' said I. 'Not the one who looked like a piece of cheese that some one has found in a train?' 'No,' said I. 'Well, they recount this of Leblanc. He served in a country where there was a disease of hens. Imagine to yourself an interesting matter for our Ministry of Agriculture. Therefore he sends a long report with respect to this malady, how it defeathers the hens, how it devastates the eggs, how it makes them bark like crows. And he ends his report thus simply, "C'est une maladie bien répandue parmi les poules. Les coqs l'ont aussi." ' It seemed to me a superb joke, such as, for example, Metternich might have whispered at the Congress of Vienna. 'Les coqs l'ont aussi'—thus was diplomacy justified of her children.

It may be imagined then that on my uncle Vittorio's arrival at the Vouillemont I was a trifle supercilious. I had composed *procès-verbaux*, I had dined at the Café de la Paix, I was a constant visitor at the Quai d'Orsay. Very well, I was prepared to

accompany my uncle to Meurice in my tails, assured that it would do him nothing but good to be seen among diplomats. My Uncle, however, thought otherwise. He appeared in the gilded suite wearing a black office jacket, striped trousers, a wholly unold Etonian tie, and holding on to his bowler as to a life-belt. 'But,' he exclaimed, 'you are too well-dressed.' 'It is for dinner,' I announced. 'Where we shall go,' he observed, 'it is only the waiters who have such clothes. But no matter; let us be marching. But first Sir Bateman; can you present me?' 'He is lying down,' I said. 'Perhaps when we return?' said my uncle. I anticipated a play and other splendours. 'He will be in bed I think,' I said. 'So much the worse. Well, let us be going,' said he.

We went—and a very long way. It seemed that my aunt Rosetta had told my uncle that I was of a very quiet disposition. 'You would not like a gay restaurant,' he assured me authoritatively. Certainly the restaurant to which he led me respected my supposititious desires. It was small, dirty and dark, epithets which applied equally to the clients and the waiters. 'You do not like rich food or alcohol,' my uncle assured me. He commanded me therefore an omelette with fine herbs and a compressed lemon. 'You have,' he added sympathetically, 'a



weak stomach.' The omelette and the lemon-squash were in the circumstances appropriate to my condition.

'And now,' he said, after giving me further information as to my tastes and habits, 'what shall we do in this Paris?' He frowned thoughtfully. 'You have no taste for wild life or for crowded theatres. Where shall I conduct you? Ah, I have it. Come!' I came. We walked a long distance down streets that grew increasingly like the Battersea Park Road. We talked chiefly of my uncle's digestion and the need for exercise. 'Walking,' he said, 'that it is which has made me what I am.' I had never liked walking. We continued till in the gloomiest street of all we came upon a public building. My uncle's eyes lit up. 'We are here,' he enunciated. 'Only enter.' I entered and gasped. I do not know what I had expected, certainly not to hear my uncle say, 'This is the newest Post Office in the banlieue. You will be interested in this!'

I took him back to the Vouillemont in a taxi. 'You grow tired easily,' he was able to assure me. 'But the English Government is rich, is it not so? A taxi fare is for them little.' We entered the hotel, the fare having been met not by the Treasury but by the most impoverished of its servants. We entered the sitting-room, where Sir Alfred was smoking a cigar in solitary splendour.

'Back already?' he said, lifting his eyebrows. 'Anything wrong?' 'Nothing,' I murmured, 'except—— But may I introduce my uncle?' Uncle Vittorio gazed intently at Sir Alfred, strode across the room with unflinching courtesy, and kissed him on both cheeks. 'He is like a son to me,' he observed. 'And where did you take your son for the evening?' inquired Sir Alfred, by no means dashed by my uncle's assault. 'He took me,' I said, 'to see a new Post Office in the suburbs.' 'He is,' said my uncle, 'so sage, so virtuous, and he has, too, a weak stomach.' 'The Post Office,' said Sir Alfred, sympathetically, 'was not too much for you, I hope?' 'No,' I said, 'not too much.' 'You will drink something?' Sir Alfred inquired. 'Alas! no,' said my uncle. 'I am troubled with my stomach. It is in fact time for my bed. You forgive me.' 'But gladly,' murmured Sir Alfred. My uncle kissed me. 'How right,' he said, 'your aunt was.' The door closed behind Vittorio. 'If your aunt is his wife,' said Sir Alfred, 'she was not right at all.' 'She is not,' I said. 'Well,' said Sir Alfred, 'I had thought of going to the Palais Royal. What do you think?' I put my coat on rapturously. 'And still,' said Sir Alfred in the taxi, 'I believe that he was an alibi.'

## VI

### SIR HENRY IRVING AND THE MARBLE HALL OF THE MIDLAND HOTEL, BRADFORD

THE last line of Tennyson's 'A' Becket', 'in manus tuas, o domine', is spoken by the stricken Archbishop on the altar-steps. Henry Irving died with these words on his lips on the stage of the Theatre Royal, Bradford. Or almost died on that stage, as will appear later.

Let me remind you of the exact situation of the theatre—for I will not do you the injury to suppose you wholly ignorant of it. It stood at the beginning of the century facing the grim strip of Manningham Lane, listening cautiously to the cobbled roar of the steam-trams. It had its flagged courtyard surmounted by a great glass awning, in which the ordinary queues might wait round two sides of the square for 'Early doors—6*d.* extra'. On extraordinary occasions the queue extended into Manningham Lane, yes, and even down the sharply sloping side-street. Whence those liquorishly inclined might gloat upon the sign of the 'Royal Standard' public-house, and those

more sombre calculate uneasily whether there was even standing room to be had. 'And with Henry Irving and Ellen Terry,' they would say—'a chance of a lifetime—heavens, let there be room.'

I meant to have told H. B. Irving—Henry's son—many years after, how right they had been to call it the chance of a lifetime. But I only contrived to tell him how his own performance in *Markheim* had moved me. 'Do you remember?' I asked him (as though I imagined that he had forgotten!)—'Do you remember how you crept into the antique-dealer's on Christmas Eve after closing time? He cupped his chin in his hand and looked hard at you—the old one. "An ill night for business," said he. "Mine will not wait," said you. "To it then," said he gruffly. It was quiet on the stage-street without and, heavens! how quiet in the audience. Your soul like a great black bat, in your great black cloak, brooded over your victim. "Did you never do a good deed in your life? Oh think of it now, if ever you did," you were crying in a sort of agony (but the words being Robert Louis Stevenson's were more delicately right). "Oh for God's sake think of one sweet kindness." But the old man would not let you off. "You've not come here to babble of these things—and late on Christmas Eve. Either shew your business—or be gone about it." With that

you gathered yourself into a black swooping, shuddering cloud, and out of the cloud, crying, "This is my business," a knife-blade sudden and vivid as forked lightning struck. Your body sobbed as with the great down-rush of thunder-rain released.'

'But,' said H. B., 'that's splendid. Did I really play so well, or do you want something like the rest? But no,' he said, looking kindly at my flushed face, 'you liked my playing?' 'Yes,' I said, 'I liked your playing—but also I wanted something of you.' His face fell, and he smiled a little wryly. 'Ask then. I'll be patient. But if it's a play you want produced I warn you I'm not an actor now—only the Admiralty official in whose room you find yourself to discuss dilution of labour in the shipyards.' 'It wasn't about a play,' I answered, 'but to speak, if I may, a little longer with Henry Irving's son.' 'Only that,' he twinkled. 'Isn't it enough?' I asked. 'What about the Markheim raptures?' 'They were genuine,' I said hotly. 'Yes,' he replied amiably, 'but there's no need to blush.'

The invitation of his attitude was interrupted by the telephone-bell, which summoned me to continue my researches into the whereabouts and habits of that elusive circumstance—the coppersmith. Only those who, in times when empires are daily falling with a dull thud, have followed that almost

unknown species to its brazen lair, know the true hunter's thrill. He wears protective disguises. He makes a noise like a millwright. He was last heard of in Wolverhampton going West. He is not a copper-smith at all but a man in another occupation with the same name doing the same work. Without him shells cannot be banded, guns wired, or indeed wars waged. Sardonic, dim and impenetrable he, and not Mr. Z., is the shadow behind munitions. And still he flies our greetings, our tears and our smiles. 'We've traced a coppersmith,' said the voice of doom over the telephone in H. B.'s room. 'Come at once.' All was discovered. I flew.

Life, that denies us most things, denied me the resumed conversation. Once or twice I caught a glimpse of Irving at the end of Conference tables where I was expounding to astonished Admirals the impossibility of providing them with any of the means of continuing their naval avocations. Each time he remembered me with a jerk, and each time as I saw his warm and benevolent eye embrace me with cordial amusement, I became self-conscious. Aged 28 or 29, I dealt less harshly than I might otherwise have done with a Second Sea Lord, full of years and honours! 'We might, perhaps,' I would say as a concession to H. B.'s amiable recognition, 'let you have three squads of

riveters. But mind,' I would add severely, as the (presumably) horizon-gazing eyes, say, of Admiral Tudor lit up with blue intensity, 'I make no promises.' Well! if that were the price of Admiralty, Lord God they would have to pay in full by letting us have some fitters in exchange.

It was at least twenty years later that at a dinner of the Old Bradfordians' Club in London I sat next to Gordon Craig. A certain Mr. Elbridge Adams of New York had bought and was proposing to publish a long series of letters exchanged between Bernard Shaw and Ellen Terry. Craig had expressed his view of the proposal with characteristic energy, and was, in fact, at the moment in the throes of a controversy with Shaw. He had not heard my name, nor, if he had, would he have been in the faintest degree interested. What he needed was a sympathetic ear which could listen to his just indignation in the matter of the mishandling of his mother's letters. 'Imagine,' he began with his magnificent leonine gesture. That, however, was only a rhetorical verb. He made no further call upon my imagination. Nevertheless, I watched for my opportunity. Twenty years I had waited to record my impression of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry in *The Merchant of Venice*. If I had been cheated of sharing my charmed recollections with the young

Irving, at least I would insist on making it known to Ellen Terry's son. Two or three times I began 'At Bradford' or 'When I saw Ellen Terry as Portia' or 'You wouldn't of course have known Unna.' 'Yes, yes,' murmured Craig and continued to expound with an echo of that voice that I still heard crying:

My Lord Bassanio, you see me where I stand.

'Yes, yes,' he said and listened not at all, thinking no doubt of his mother with avaricious tenderness, and also a little pre-occupied with the speech which he was shortly to make.

But I had my revenge. For while he was speaking eloquently and gracefully on the future of the theatre I brooded on its past. And, I thought, since it is an Old Bradfordian dinner, and since Ellen Terry's son is here, why shouldn't I at last unburden my soul? I will, and I did when my turn came. For, I said, that I had waited twenty years to tell the world how I had first seen Henry Irving and Ellen Terry play *The Merchant*. Since Irving had magnificently ended his great days at Bradford might I not, in the presence of Ellen Terry's son, tell my story? I waited for no permission.

You have not forgotten, I said to the Bradfordians, the Old Theatre Royal, nor how the queues for the pit used on great



occasions to shake their long tail down Hallfield Road? They had not forgotten. When I was fourteen, I said, with 1s. 9d. in my pocket and Golconda in my heart, I stole down Manningham Lane at 12.30 for the Irving *matinée*. I found to my horror that the audience as to about a thousand had anticipated me. But what of that? I observed Harry Unna in the tenth row—about twenty from the door. I went up to him and took his arm. ‘Hallo, father,’ I said. ‘Here I am.’ The persons in the eleventh and twelfth positions murmured a little. Harry Unna, on the other hand, said not a word. Whether it was sheer amazement or sheer goodness of heart that silenced him I do not know. At any rate, even if, as is probable, he has forgotten the incident, I waft him my thanks across the years.

The doors opened and we surged in—to no less a place than the centre of the second row of the pit. The sweet familiar smell of oranges, sweat, footlights and resin intoxicated my mind. ‘If only I had sixpence left for sweets,’ I thought, but Harry was beforehand with me, and silently handed me a twopenny bar of chocolate cream. I unwrapped the silver paper and, as the substance slowly melted in my hot hand, melted into an ecstasy with every sense exquisitely excited and unappeased.

The curtain rose upon a house hushed as

Severn hushes the babbling Wye. The Venetians bestrode the stage and strewed the stage with Shakespeare's noble words like rose-petals in the path of a king entering his capital after successful wars. The whole theatre waited, tremulous with expectation. Almost, it seemed, they felt that William had deliberately withheld Shylock so that they might be whipped to a frenzy of anticipation. Then without more ado a tall and stooping figure in a long Jewish gaberdine flowed on to the stage. There was a roar of welcome. Irving had arrived.

It is known to be impossible to convey the greatness of an actor to those who have not seen him. That is the penalty of his immense contemporary domination. Useless, therefore, to record how under his slow, heavy lids this Shylock concealed the passion of a whole race—its fear, its secular anguish, and its unbending arrogance. The sloping shoulders were bent under the weight of centuries of oppression. The long, lean hands fawned in helpless abasement. The voice was that which the taskmasters heard in the brick-yards of Egypt.

Or so it seemed to the boy in the pit—till suddenly in a later scene the shoulders straightened as Shylock denounced Antonio. The dangerous eyes shone unveiled, the sheathed hands shot out their claws. The exile by the waters of Babylon remembered

the tumbling walls of Jericho. 'Give me my pound of flesh,' he cried, as Moses demanded the first-born of the Egyptian oppressors. The God of Israel was still a God of vengeance.

When he returned at night to find Jessica flown and his house all in dark he spoke not at all. 'My ducats and my daughter' came later. He beat upon the door. Only echo answered. He beat again and again. Echo answered softly in his brain: 'Absalom, Absalom, Absalom, my son.' So to the great scenewhen, before Portia—all in red—a figure of light, he stood, the dark, doubtful figure of that Wandering Jew who doubts all things but himself first. He passed through the whole range of extreme hope, delight, nascent doubt, fear, panic terror, and last the blackest despair of the crucified heart. He rose to his full height for an instant. Then shrunk upon himself blind and muttering. He could not see the gay young judge, could not hear the wicked laughter of the Christians, knew scarcely where he stood. All drew away from him while, treading softly, he swayed and stumbled across the Court. There was a glitter of bright Venetian costumes unrelieved by the sombre gaberdine. Shylock had gone.

Well, as more than one of my auditors assured me, when I at length resumed my seat, this had nothing to do with the Old

Bradfordians. But I didn't care. 'I had meant to say all that to H. B. Irving,' I told Gordon Craig, 'but Fate prevented me. And there is another thing. They are wrong to say that this does not concern Bradford, since it was in Bradford that he died. I was in the town that night, but not at the theatre. And yet all my life I have felt as though I had heard those last words. Odd, isn't it?' 'No, not odd,' said Craig.

I was glad that he had gone before one cheerful diner anxious to prick my bubble came over and thumped me on the shoulder. 'D'you remember,' he said, 'that Irving died at Bradford?' 'I do,' I said, still a little dazed. 'Then,' he said, with a pleased smile, 'you remember the post-card of the Midland Hotel, don't you?' 'Post-card?' I inquired vaguely. 'What post-card?' 'Why,' he observed, going off, 'the post-card that had printed on the back of it, "The Marble hall of the Midland Hotel, Bradford, where Sir Henry Irving breathed his last."'

## VII

### GERARD CHOWNE'S CARPET

SOMEWHERE in Vale Avenue there is an inscription over a house—not affixed by a grateful L.C.C.: ‘Here lived Gerard Chowne, Painter.’ I did not think that such a memorial would appear over his house in 1930 when I met him with Albert Rothenstein outside South Kensington Underground Station one June evening in 1914. Albert, like his brother Will, stoutly claimed to be among the taller of mankind, but he was prepared to admit that his 5ft. 5in. was overtopped by the loping grace of Chowne’s 6ft. 1in. They came round the corner from Pelham Street like Big and Little Klaus in the fairy-story, except that Big Klaus was incapable of killing anybody’s horses. Indeed, if Chowne had owned a horse and somebody had borrowed and then claimed it for his own, he would have been both too good-natured and too shy to protest. ‘You must get your horse back’, his friends would say. ‘I know,’ he would reply slowly with an uneasy grin. ‘But have you seen how we’re getting on with the carpet?’

That was no doubt the first observation he meant to make when he saw me. 'No,' I said, anticipating him. 'I don't know how far the carpet's progressed. But,' I added, seeing his crestfallen face, 'why don't you and Albert come round to supper at Neville Street? I believe that we've got enough cold pie and beer to go round.' After considering the suggestion from every point of view they could see no harm in it. 'Yes,' said Albert, 'we'll come.' 'What about Nora?' asked Chowne, wondering no doubt whether his wife had enough money to buy herself a meal. 'Oh, I'll telephone to Nora—from Neville Street,' said Albert. There was no more to be said. We walked the short distance through Onslow Gardens till we reached No. 8. Dusty—the wire-haired terrier—barked a good deal, because he imagined that his considerable share of any meal would be affected. After Chowne had lifted him up and shown him the pie, which he contemplated with his head on one side, he concluded that there would be enough for all, and after an absent-minded bite or two tucked his obviously made-up and painted face upon his paws and grumbled himself to sleep. We sat down cheerfully enough at the table. The pie was admirable. Jessie produced lettuces, tomatoes and cucumbers, in which we were largely wallowing. We talked, I suppose, of pictures, of Ann aged

a few months lying upstairs, of the brilliant summer, of all easy, comfortable and happy things. Presently the quiet of the June evening was rudely shattered by the loud voices of newsboys. Their announcement was obviously of importance because doors were opening all about, and people issuing to buy the paper. 'I can't hear what they say,' said Albert. 'Wait,' I said. 'I'll get one.' I went into the street and took one from the boy, who suspended his yell, and with great skill took it up at the point where it had broken off. I read the headlines. 'Well, what is it?' they asked in chorus as I came in. 'It seems,' I said, 'that some Austrian Archduke has been assassinated at a place called Sarajevo in Serbia—probably a lie.' 'But if it's true?' Gerard inquired languidly with a tomato in his hand. 'Oh, I expect there'll be all sorts of squabbles, and mailed fists will be squared—and then circled in amity. Nothing much to bother about I expect. Have another glass of beer.' 'Trust me,' said Gerard pouring the stuff out. The sun poured in through the window on a scene as remote from horror and death as a Dutch interior. The lettuces looked like the promise of an eternal peace. 'Yes,' said Gerard, lighting a cigarette and leaning back, 'I expect that it is just the newspapers at their ordinary job of increasing circulation. And even if it were true it wouldn't mean

anything.' 'No,' we all agreed, 'it wouldn't mean anything.'

So perhaps they were saying and consoling themselves in a hundred thousand English homes in the lost land, the legendary world before the War. To complete the domestic interior Jessie brought down Ann, and posed her against a brilliant green Chinese jacket. She crumpled her fists in her mouth and made certain obscure observations to them of a comfortable and wholly unmilitary nature. Nothing could be less like the eve of a war—and in fact nothing could be more like. For so all wars must always have begun, so abominably and devilishly shattering, like broken glass upon quiet things, people and places. Two months later Chowne in shorts was doing physical jerks in St. James's Park with two hundred others in Kitchener's No. 1. He died a few months later of a fever at Malta.

Doverly—Michel Salaman's house—where I first met Gerard Chowne, stood in a fold of the hills above Porlock in north Somerset, with its back to the hills and its thatched forehead to the sea. Ridiculously thatched round the veranda so that you might conceive the house, like a stage rustic, tugging at its rusty forelock. But if the outside of the house had a touch of absurdity it was all chintz and Chippendale within, and looked out solemnly on as fair a scene as any in



England. We had come overnight and had been driven over from Minehead in the dark. There was nothing to be seen in the deep lanes with the high banks, and little to be guessed of what the morning was to show. We tumbled out of the car, warmed ourselves at the great wood fire, taking care as far as possible not to tread on Aaron, the mastiff, who had the strange habit of appearing in all parts of the room at once, and watched the flicker of light on the beams and the shadowy staircase that led up to the gallery. The first supper was all hunting and, as I seem to remember, whisky. Michel's brother was able to reassure the returned Master of the Exmoor of hard-riding activities in his absence. And not that only. As one of the figures out of Surtees he had heavily punished the whisky cask. 'It'll need half-a-dozen bottles or so to fill it up,' he surmised—obviously one of the old school, and equally obviously wearing his old school tie. But next morning there were better things than whisky to contemplate. The land leaned forward hugely from Dover, humping its immense shoulders upon its deeply recoiled elbows. Red it ran down to a great cleft where the sea fitted into the shore as neatly as blue linoleum laid by a skilled craftsman. There was a wide, sweet air, astonishingly soft for the third week in December. The sun was in fact in half a mind to supplant

Santa Claus, and fill everybody's stockings with himself. He had indeed gone so far as to betray a few late roses to button-hole the ragged bushes in the garden. But the tramp, who was shooed out later, knew better. 'Privit garding,' he said indignantly. 'See for yourself! It's a blooming cemingtery—and them roses bought ahtside off a barrer by the bereaved.'

The tramp had, however, been roused by the rain, which swept down from Exmoor like a squall seeking to engulf a sailing-boat. Every door rattled in Dover, the thatch rustled miserably and a few windows banged loudly, but the house, used to these alarms, gaily rode out the storm. It was, however, necessary to abandon the scheme which Gerard Chowne had been nourishing all day. This was to provide a torchlight procession, decorations and bunting to celebrate the appearance of Albert Rothenstein and Nora, Gerard's wife, who were to arrive at dinner-time. Careful investigation in the cellars of Dover had revealed three croquet sets, seven or eight tennis nets, what looked like the outfit for a Polar expedition on a large scale, two or three miles of rubber hose, parts of a machine-gun, a dummy horse, eight easels and (to interrupt the catalogue) about twenty poles and strings of fairy-lights. It was clear to Chowne that this moment had been long foreseen in the annals of the house.

The material for the triumphal avenue was at hand. Attired in oilskins and sou'wester, he laboured for two hours planting poles, only to have them blown back about him. He was compelled to desist and to return to his indoor activities of scene-painting for the children's play.

In order, however, not too acutely to disappoint him, arrangements were made for a Mayoral reception of the distinguished strangers. An address of welcome was hastily composed and beautifully inscribed by one or other of the painters. A red beard, red flannel and two thicknesses of dog-chain with a salver attached transformed Michel into the most Mayoral of all dignitaries. Standing comfortably within the warmth of the house Michel read the address (which lasted about half an hour) to the newcomers, who, as the rain fell, looked less and less like visiting royalty and more and more like refugees from Dartmoor. Nor did they actively show any gratitude when the freedom of Dover was conferred upon them in the course of an eloquent speech of slightly longer duration delivered by the Deputy Mayor, Mr. Gerard Chowne. What was left of the recently enfranchised was then dragged into shelter by a life-boat expedition. When three or four hours later they were capable of speech, they took occasion to express their feelings in appropriate terms.

But what of that? The play was the thing. It was to be the Nursery Rhymes duly enacted by the children and performed for the benefit of the County immediately after Christmas. Scenery was urgently required. There were present as potential painters Albert, Gerard, Gibbon, Michel, not to mention Chattie Salaman and Gwen Gibbon, both late of the Slade and all the West End picture shows. Some slight difficulty in deciding the manner of the scenes and the *décor* was experienced. It seemed to Albert that a good deal of stripe and tassel work would be required—no straight lines, if you understand me, but the object presented directly to the audience. We must, he thought, at all costs avoid the faults that Tree incessantly committed at His Majesty's. A few back-cloths, possibly an apron—and above all no camels. It was generally agreed that there should be no camels. On other points, however, there were contrary views. Gerard felt that some floral design should be introduced. You might, he said, as it were, produce the effect of tapestry, even of weaving. He conceived the whole thing as late Conder with the fan worked in wools—a sort of carpet *motif*. It was necessary, he said, to lose no opportunity of inculcating the importance of carpet-weaving at a time when all the handicrafts were dying out. Gibbon agreed that the handicrafts were

dying out. For his part, however, he was convinced that something nearer woodcut was desirable. He might be mannered, but for him the two primary colours—black and white—were good enough. Some of the queer, hard angles of the graving-tools in the scenery and the costume were required. Take for example the Knave of Hearts. Clearly something post-Beardsley was called for—grape-hyacinth hair over copper-graved shoulders would, he thought, give the note. Michel interposed to say that he had lost the script. Vague eyes were turned in his direction. The script—what precisely had the script to do with the matters under discussion? Would Michel be good enough to understand that the whole failure in the contemporary theatre was due to the fact that attention was centred on the playwright and the play. The true way—the Russian way—was to begin with the scenery and the *décor*, then produce the costumes and the lighting, and then, if time made this possible, introduce characters and a plot. Not that Albert had a particularly high opinion of Bakst, or that Gerard would advocate the methods of Norman Wilkinson of Four Oaks (or three blasted elms as the case might be). But for heaven's sake let Michel be serious and not clutter up the scenery by dragging in the script.

At this point I ventured a word. Heartily as I agreed that there was no contemporary

writer whose work had actually been produced on the stage (I underlined actually) which deserved to take precedence over the scenery, yet I suggested that if they would care to listen to a few lines that I had been jotting down. . . . They did not want to listen to a few lines that I had been jotting down, particularly as it was obvious that I had jotted down about a hundred. They had no doubt that they would be mirrors of eloquent beauty, but it was fatal to disturb the mind of the painter with preconceived ideas. What, for example, had happened, said Gerard, when Tree produced *The Merchant of Venice*? They positively had a tank of water blown upon by vast bellows to lap the imitation marble-stairs upon which the Moor ranted. If, however, the scene-painter had never read the play and had merely been told a Moor and Venice, how different would his freedom have been! But, I objected, he might have thought that you meant Dartmoor or Exmoor, and it would have impeded the action if part of the play had taken place at night surrounded by foxhounds, stags and hunt-servants. My humour, they felt, was schoolboy. Anyhow, asked Michel, what had I written? A Shakespearian prologue is in process of excubation, I said, with modest pride. 'Hell,' they groaned. 'What sort of paints and canvas have you, Michel?'

On the morning of December 24th the painters decided to go a-hunting, so that little progress could be made with work. Michel and Gerard in pink and Albert in what I understand is known as rat-catcher, greatly bestriding vast horses and duly accompanied by Chattie on one equally vast, rode off. I followed with Jessie in a small gig. My aversion for fox-hunting does not necessarily date from that day, but its incidents may have contributed to it. The horse which I was driving was one of those dreamers of whom one reads in poetry. He drifted vaguely about with little reference to time or space and with none to my encouragements or discouragements. It was raining tempestuously—bad; he was being driven by a character out of *The Pickwick Papers*—worse; and anyhow this was the steepest hill that any horse had ever climbed. For some reason we arrived at the meet before the hunt started, possibly because for the last mile the horse had decided that after all it was a horse of action, a strong, silent horse that had heard John Peel at the break of day and was proposing to indulge in a spot of break of neck. Full of vigour we drove into the middle of the pack, scattering the intimidated followers and no doubt riding down a dog or two. Not that I failed to turn the gig, but at the expense of charging the meet and pack from the opposite

direction. Cheered loudly and enthusiastically by the grateful hunt we bolted in the opposite direction, having contrived to upset the driving-seat so that the reins were held from the floor. When the sheer weight of the weather into which he was running finally stopped the horse, we picked ourselves out of the bottom of the cart. We returned home slowly, I leading the horse, Jessie watching him closely, and the horse from time to time coughing (or chuckling) hoarsely.

Nevertheless we arrived home five hours before the huntsmen, which gave me an opportunity not only to complete the prologue but to write a hunting-song of unusual and penetrating quality. What was said about the gig when the men of action returned is, for their sakes, better left unrecorded. They were, after all, painters, and it is general knowledge that language has very little meaning to such. After dinner, however, I cowed them by reciting the beginning of the following poem in spite of the most strenuous opposition:

Here's to the pack that's flat on its back,  
And here's to the drink we're mixin',  
And here's to the song, as we bowl along,  
Behind the fox and the vixen.

Even Gerard admitted that this would lend itself to illustration, and Albert conceived a decoration of wreathed foxhounds faintly foreshortened into striped harlequins. Only



Michel was distracted. 'You haven't forgotten,' he said a little sulkily, 'that this is the children's play for their amusement.' At which we all turned upon him like a single waterspout. As if we'd ever thought it anything else. Weren't the children to be given the right ideas? If Michel wanted them all to become Royal Academicians and followers of Beerbohm Tree there was nothing further to be said. But if he had a spark of the New English Art Club spirit left perhaps he wouldn't interfere when all that was being done was to give them a chance of forming an unprejudiced point of view. Yes, said Michel stubbornly, but what about the Shakespearian prologue? Oh, that, they said contemptuously; we thought you meant the scenery.

Presently, however, they broke off reluctantly to swallow a few oysters and drain a glass or two of Michel's champagne. Gerard Chowne had devised a play to be conducted entirely by deaf-mutes, and Albert had thought of a way of so masking them that they would not interfere with the background. For the moment they were prepared to dally with nutriment, and were even tempted to look at the Christmas presents. It will—or may—be remembered that in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* the wicked Earl had prepared all the Toy There Was to mislead the affections of his grandson. It was not necessary

to mislead the affections of Euston, Susie and Jill, but the toys that had descended on Doverly would have distracted the whole of Hamelin and have left the disconsolate piper to follow Tom's son over the hills and far away. This was the odder, as at the beginning of his married life Michel had solemnly assured himself that on the best Montessori (or Monte Carlo, I forget which) principles, a reel and a ball of string were all that would be vouchsafed to the children in the way of toys. Outside Hamley's it would have been difficult to discover any room less like a combination of a reel and a ball of string.

It must be conceded that the toys rarely reached the children intact. Gerard, for example, discovered a game of the four climbing sailors. Could he play it? Not very well for the first hour or two. But to do him justice he acquired supreme skill as the elastic supporting the gyrations of the last A.B. snapped, leaving a mass of jetsam, flotsam, lagan and derelict in the smart new box. Albert discovered a private way of juggling with two marvellous tumbler dolls. Amid applause he tossed them and caught them till they finally crashed through the largest of the three dolls' china tea-services. Gibbon and I scorned such childish pastimes. We happily turned on the new gramophone, which had been bought to replace the broken-down old crock purchased as long ago as

the year before. It was only after much acclamation and self-congratulation on the part of Michel that it was discovered that we were playing the old one.

Christmas morning opened brightly with a hunting-chorus, sung to no tune on earth outside the front door by an alleged company of whips and Wops. It began as follows:

Good morning, Mister Salaman,  
We hope we see you well.  
We also hope your madam an'  
Your family excel.

It did not, however, continue, because the distinguished author's inspiration had suffered a temporary lapse. Nor did it ever return; so that like a single line of the French Symbolists these four remain as a permanent, if brief, addition to the sporting literature of Great Britain. The performers after breakfast proceeded with their rival schemes of scene-painting. In vain the authoress and the cast sought for rooms in which to rehearse. All were occupied by infuriated men and a strong smell of paint. Finally the discouraged actors and actresses were driven to the studio in the garden—only to find it in possession of a troupe of Boy Scouts. These as their good deed of the day were engaged in target-practice. One of a peculiarly rotund figure was discovered with his rifle pointing at the lamp. 'What,' he was severely asked by the manageress,

'are you aiming at?' 'The lamp,' he said simply, pulling the trigger. The fire was duly extinguished and a new lamp found. But some damage had been done. For late that night a smell of burning was detected. The Pageant of Empire which was in process of enactment was hastily abandoned. All hands rushed to the hose. Gerard, in particular, wearing the clothes that he conceived appropriate to the dual roles of Reading and Maida Vale gave several spirited imitations of Laocoön at his liveliest. Indeed, the work of rescue was arrested by attempts to complete the group with the inclusion of one or more children. This course being, as it was thought, somewhat selfishly opposed by the parents, nothing remained but to fasten the hose to the tank. Here trouble was engendered by the fact that the necessary joints were missing, and that the tank was frozen. It was, however, the work of a moment for somebody to fall accidentally into the tank and, as it were, break the ice. Gerard ingeniously so contrived it that water began to spurt out of the hose at the most unexpected points. At last with shouts of triumph a full stream of water directed itself against one of the outlying members of the fire-brigade. It was now, therefore, time to locate the fire, which had, not unnaturally, been overlooked in the bustle of arranging for its extinction. In a

very mysterious way the fire had concealed itself. Pour the water on whatever quarter we might, no answering hiss rejoiced our hearts. We were driven to conclude that the thing, as the result of sheer pusillanimity, had gone out, leaving the drenched and disfigured rescuers in possession of the stricken field.

Such interruptions as these did not interfere with the progress of the painting. By the morning of the 28th all was ready, and the children were introduced to their setting. Here, however, a slight hitch occurred. The smaller ones screamed helplessly at the sight of their projected background. It was, therefore, in the long run decided to have plain canvas, unpainted. This, however, only confirmed the artists in their previous opinion that the scenery must be treated independently of the play. And, in any case, Gerard had contrived to introduce a new flower-scheme with which he would still further be able to complicate the design of the carpet.

The carpet was being woven in Vale Avenue by shifts from the Slade School. Its pattern was that of a basket of roses scattered over the ground. Gerard, cruellest of task-masters, flogged on his volunteers to a frenzy of activity. It was certainly begun in 1912; it was calculated that at the existing rate of progress it would be finished certainly by 1950. Gerard returned with renewed energy

from Doverly to superintend the unpicking of all those parts of which he had thought better. Penelope might have envied him his patience.

But, unlike Penelope, Gerard did not see his wanderer come home. The carpet was in the hand-loom in 1912. Gerard died in 1915. I heard that it was possible that the carpet might be finished this year. I wish that it might be possible to go back to Albert's studio in Thurloe Square and sit in the deep wicker-chair. I wish that it might be a late spring afternoon again and that the telephone might ring as I heard it ring so often. I would take off the receiver. 'Hallo,' I'd say. 'This is Gerard,' the voice would reply. 'I say, the carpet's finished.'

## VIII

### THE WHITE TROUSERS OF MR. ARTHUR BALFOUR

IT began with the telephone-bell ringing in a garage across the road at Frinton-under-Sea. A small and dirty boy blundered through the little furnished house into the field at the back, where I was sitting lapped in peace and white flannels. 'If you're Mr. Wolfe,' he said, 'you're wanted in Lunnon. Mr. Adams says, "Come back at once."'

Many still living remember the broad bright heat of that 3rd of August. In Essex the sun tumbled like a cloudburst of golden hail on the green flats. As I changed into town clothes, cheerful holiday-makers streamed down the lane past the house seawards. One young man with tousled yellow hair, perhaps a pierrot, went past strumming a banjo and singing. His song, which hung on the quiet air, was from the Revue of the moment—'The Passing Show'. 'I'm here and you're here, so why should we care,' he sang as he walked down to the shore on the morning of August 3rd 1914.

The tune and the words—most lying of all that throat could have uttered on that particular day—came with me all across the Eastern Counties through which I fled in a hired car to London. I remember, before I started, going to speak to a little clerk who had rented the house next door. I felt exactly like a character in that terrible hush at the beginning of one of Mr. Wells's romances. There would be this light curiosity, the friendly chatter, the little folk going about their business, and presently a distant mounting rumour, growing to the formidable roar of a nation in flight. 'The Martians are coming!' the mob would be sobbing as it ran. The mob were right, but little the fussy manikin from the City recked of their abrupt neighbourhood. 'I've got to go to London,' I said. 'If anything happens——' I began to feel embarrassed under his blue and vacant stare, almost as thin and persistent as chloroform. Nevertheless I continued, 'If anything happens, you might keep an eye on my wife and baby. They'll be rather alone.' He looked dim and hostile. 'What should 'appen?' he asked. 'Don't you read the papers?' I answered. 'Oh that,' he said with a chuckle of relief. 'I thought you meant somethink serious—you know, doing a bolt from your missus or somethink. If that's all you've got on your mind, you may rely on me.' As I



went down the little path I heard him shouting to his wife: "Ere," he was saying, "ere, come 'ere. I've got a good one to tell you. That chap next door——"; but, before, he had expounded the full humour of the chap, that creature was in the motor-car with the whole Sunday summer world humming, 'For I'm here and you're here'.

Like millions of other young men in the world on that day I was borne forward on an impulse as though I was a part of some great clear wind that with one bright puff had murdered the sleep in the soul of man. In a crazy happiness of excitement I left my family and little house for the old wars. True, I was not going to battle, but only to an office desk and a telephone. But who knew to how changed a desk, to a telephone whispering what incredible news? Jessie stood at the door in the sunshine. I thought that the striped print that she wore would be a pleasant thing to recall. I looked away to the tin garage that, having achieved its purpose, had sunk back into rusty slumber. The driver put in his clutch and we sped round the corner out of holidays into the road back to London. First the long empty roads with the gay green trees, then Colchester with a few soldiers strolling about the streets and an air of expectation, and presently the long unpopulated expanse of the Mile End Road with a little crowd

coming towards me in the far distance. They were carrying a banner which bellied out as I passed. It was entangled in the bonnet of the car. We did not stop, we would not have stopped if a couple of elephants had confronted us. The tune sang in my ears, the mad impulse tugged at my heart. We drew up at the door of Queen Anne's Chambers, like the Greek runner who brought the news and died. The bonnet of the car was still enwrapped in a banner which demanded 'Stop the War'. Madness and treachery! I tore it off, and went into the building. For me the War had begun.

To have lived through a great war as a civilian is a vivid and abominable experience. Others go across the sea, disappearing noiselessly into dark. Perhaps, as some war-books testify, they leap into cleanness; perhaps, as many more, they tumble face foremost into the mud where the hogs have been. But whichever way it is with them they have action; they are in the presence of the undeniable fact. They do not hear rumours, repeat terrified and terrifying gossip, or live like cottagers on a lonely moor before the printing press split the dark. This is the civilian state. The first casualty in every war is truth, and with the death of truth the Middle Age returns. The General and the Cabinet Minister, each in his place, lie persistently, unremittingly and

conscientiously. The small man, with his sure instinct for corruption, at first suspects, and then is infected by, the general miasma. Till by the gradual progress of the malady the seven deadly vices become the seven deadlier virtues. I remember, for example, a charming middle-aged woman in a train talking to her slip of a daughter, as both knitted placidly. From time to time, as her gaze fell upon me, a sudden and wholly inappropriate scowl crumpled the gentle imbecility of her face. She fussed over her daughter, bidding her draw her scarf closer for fear of the draught. She insisted on her putting on her own fur gloves, though in the unheated carriage her own hands were almost blue with cold. Presently the girl said something about air-raids. 'Air-raids?' said the older woman; 'if there weren't German spies in the Government they would send our aeroplanes over Berlin and blow the schools sky-high. Adder's brood——' 'But, mother,' protested the girl, 'that would be child-murder.' 'You can't murder a German,' said she, 'and you can't start wiping them out too early.' She looked across at me challengingly, her face still contorted with fury imposed on its rotundity like a comic mask. I said nothing. Her face relaxed. She resumed her knitting. 'No, don't you start again,' she said to her daughter. 'Your hands will get cold. Just sit and hug

yourself.' Or again I think of sitting in some restaurant at a table next to a man in smart City clothes and his blonde. The others had difficulty in obtaining a reasonable portion in exchange for their coupons. Not so this person, whose dim leer indicated some special relationship with the management. His plate and hers were full and, though he loudly refused to drink German wine, he felt that a bottle of what he called 'bubbly' was needed to console the tired business man and the woman who was his business. He did not actually suck his teeth or shovel his food under his small moustache, but he contrived to suggest both these actions without performing either. He was cumbered with much wealth. 'I don't like these new notes,' he said, drawing out about sixty from his pocket, and relinquishing a few in his lady's possession after a little slapping of slim by less slim hands. Presently with the coffee and his second brandy he became mellow. It was the time when Mr. Churchill, after displaying reckless gallantry in the trenches, had been summoned back to politics. The City man sank back with his thumbs (metaphorically) in his waistcoat. 'This Winston,' he said; 'I knew it wouldn't be long before he was back in a "cushy" job. I told old Blenkins so: laid him evens. Well——' He smiled at his chosen. She patted her hair, adjusted her vanity bag and

her face. 'You are a one,' she murmured. But she was wrong. He was not a one: he was a hundred thousand and more in time of war.

No shadow of these things haunted me as I lay exhausted on the grass at Kew Gardens three weeks later. For they had been three weeks of spectacular and violent life, justifying an allegorical interpretation of the tune that I had brought up with me from Frinton. The Gardens were all but empty. The sun could not reach me where I lay snugly under a great oak. Bees hummed, and the flowers swayed with hot scent. I was very tired, having been up all the night before, and all the night before that. I stretched myself with a luxurious sigh in the murmurous quiet. I could not from there hear the noise of London. I heard no sounds at all, and least of all the soft distant thud of guns, like quiet feet trampling down the stars.

In the background of my mind was the terrible hush in which the whole world waited before the authentic clash of the armies overseas. 'Brussels the bait,' the headlines stoutly proclaimed in explanation of that weary retreat—an explanation that, like much else in the Press, I was beginning to doubt. But it wasn't of that I was thinking on the warm grass between sleep and waking. I thought first of three consoling

things—that my car from Frinton had cost £5 10s., paid out of cash lying at the Paymaster-General's Office out of the total of £20 upon which Great Britain started upon war, that when I was sent to the Admiralty late on the evening of the 3rd I was blandly assured by the porter that nobody was about, and thirdly that in the course of the debate on August 4th every speech, with the exception of Sir Edward Grey's, had been anti-war—with the natural English consequence that war was declared at midnight. A sane beloved nation, I thought, all heroism and no heroics.

There were other thoughts too, less satisfying. There was Victor Fox on the morning of the 4th of August telling me the first of the spy stories and adding that a big F.O. official had hurried from a Cabinet Meeting across Downing Street sobbing, 'Those damned poltroons.' What a marvellous escape, I thought, as I lay on the grass, from eternal shame. No doubt the great F.O. Official had contributed his lion-hearted share. Then there was the memory of a dinner at the Union Club on the evening of the 4th with William Beveridge and a Liberal Member of Parliament. We watched the mob go roaring and cheering past, brandishing flags on a tidal wave of enthusiasm that swept all before it. We stood on the steps and heard for the first time voices

singing, 'It's a long way to Tipperary'. I, of course, shared the delirium, but Beveridge stood in silence, fidgeting with his hands. 'It's splendid, isn't it?' I shouted. The Liberal Member looked at me sadly. 'Is death so splendid?' he asked. 'Useless, tragic, incalculable death.' 'You don't mean,' I gasped, 'that you'd let the French down?' 'No,' he said, 'I don't mean that. I just don't mean that.' He turned away. What, I wondered, lying in the grass, exactly did he mean. We were pledged, weren't we? Belgium had been violated, hadn't it? Well, then, what could he have meant?

I contrasted him with the robust young clergyman whom I had met in the Army and Navy Stores. I was in the Arms Department, considering the purchase of a revolver in the vague anticipation that I might need one. A hearty hand clapped my shoulder. 'Good lad!' said he. 'The bullets will soon be flying out of that to mow down the Huns.' I was a trifle uneasy at this undeserved commendation, but much heartened by the Christian willingness to destroy the foes of Zion. I contrasted his vigorous and foolish face with the quiet, ambiguous darkness of the other's anxious intelligence. 'Such a man as the Liberal Member,' I thought, 'is not fit for war.' It seemed to me to be a condemnation.

I had travelled a very long way from summer and Frinton when in the February of 1915 I first entered a room in which both Arthur Balfour and Lloyd George were seated. The glow and splendour had mysteriously begun to be lost in the mud of Flanders. The first blind belief in Kitchener had yielded to a growing uneasiness. What of rifles, shells and guns? insistent voices began to ask, and voices not always ready to be silenced by the suggestion prevalent in some military and other quarters that to seek to remedy the Army's deficiencies was to help the enemy. Rank after rank of impertinents were mowed down by the powers of self-satisfied evasion. But at last the valiant resistance to the processes of thought which is the contribution of so many eminent soldiers to the process of war broke down before the immense national uneasiness.

The slow, historic wrath of England began to direct itself against apparent neglect and inefficiency. The Press, in all other particulars neither permitted nor anxious to deal with facts, seized upon this one. A confused murmur of ignorant rage began to clamour at the doors of authority. The armies were in danger, it seemed, but, what was perhaps more productive of action, the Government was also in danger. They acted. A committee, or rather several



conflicting committees, covering the same ground, were appointed.

At some later date in my life, when it will be possible for me to do so, and if it still seems worth while to correct some of the more outrageous misstatements on the munitions position at the beginning of 1915, I may deal at length with these committees and their ultimate absorption in the Ministry of Munitions. Like the ghost of Hamlet's father, 'I could a tale unfold'. For the moment I am concerned with persons, not events, and the dazzling person for me on that committee was not the chairman with his frame of a thickset little Welsh Rugby half-back and his general air of one waiting on tiptoe for the ball to be hurled out of the scrum. No, Mr. Lloyd George was not my primary object. The figure that made my heart beat faster as I entered the room at the Treasury was slender and stooping. It gave the impression of languid grace which would throw a pinch of snuff in the eyes of life, treating it as the plebeian it plainly was. It was attired in an ordinary office suit, but in some way suggested negligent ruffles. It adjusted its pince-nez, as it listened courteously to the red-faced imbecilities of some adjacent soldier. It was cool, carrying its own atmosphere in a vacuum that its aloofness created, and in a time of heat, hate and hysteria it was

infinitely reassuring. It was in fact Arthur Balfour.

A fortnight later I was walking alone with him across Horse Guards to lunch in Carlton Gardens. He was unwilling to think of the War and the committee. I remembered a tale that Wolmer had told me of him during the Russo-Japanese war. 'You were in bed,' I said to him, 'and you were Prime Minister.' 'Both,' he murmured, 'possible, and neither, at any rate not the first, wholly discreditable.' 'There was a crisis of some sort and Wolmer burst in to ask you about it. There are one of three policies possible, he said, sitting on the end of the bed. You can either intensify your neutrality, modify it or even end it. In this war, I beg your pardon, you interrupted, but you speak of war. What war?' Mr. Balfour rubbed his hands. 'Splendid,' he said. 'This is splendid. Invent some more things.' 'But I didn't invent it,' I said; 'Wolmer told me—at the time when we were founding the Oxford Movement.' 'Oh,' said he, 'I thought that was Pusey.' 'Yes, but ours was the New Oxford Movement—the resuscitation of the Conservative Party. Our main plank was——' And I stopped short in the deepest embarrassment, remembering exactly what that plank had been. Mr. Balfour laughed outright as he turned the key in the door. 'Heavenly,' he chuckled. 'I know what your main plank was—you

man-eaters. B.M.G.—Balfour Must Go. 'Though,' he said as he went in, 'I never realized that my method of going was in fact the New Oxford Movement.'

We were three at lunch in the long dining-room. Miss Balfour faced her brother. The conversation at first still avoided the War. Mr. Balfour spoke of metaphysics and listened patiently while I pointed out some of the major defects in his system. He was so charming, however, and so palpably a great man that I conceded to him the possibility that my view might not be right. 'But don't spare me,' he observed. 'You were saying, I think, that only a total ignorance of Neo-Hegelianism could justify some of my wilder excesses.' 'Oh, I say,' I cried, and blushed. 'Oh, you say,' he answered. 'D'you hear him?' He looked happily across at his sister. 'Oh, he says! Youth still bumps his puzzled head against the stars and wakes to apologize to the nearest policeman.' Not a very great phrase, perhaps, but spoken in that room at that moment it seemed so to me. I remembered Mr. Evesham in H. G. Wells's *The New Machiavelli*, and I remembered how Wells had said of that character that he had long patches of ordinariness, and then suddenly something happened which was like 'watching the flight of an eagle through a staircase window'. I was too excited not to blurt it

out. 'Would it be even worse manners,' I inquired, 'if I reminded you of what Wells said about you in *The New Machiavelli*?' 'It wouldn't be bad manners at all,' he said. 'My sister and I like your manners.' I told him, all hot with admiration, about the staircase and the eagle. He remained as cool as a statue of himself by a cynical sculptor. 'I must read the book,' he said. 'What did you say the name was?'

But, before he took me upstairs to see his gallery of Burne-Jones pictures, he made one passing reference to events of the moment. Miss Balfour handed him an extract from a French paper which had been sent to him. It was a map of the front in France, showing the relative sectors held by the French and English in red and blue. The blue sector could barely be discovered with a magnifying glass in the long, red coils of the French serpent. The plan was headed, 'L'Effort Anglais.' Mr. Balfour put it on one side. 'Inconvenient,' he said; 'yes, I think inconvenient. Shall we go up and see my pictures?' I wandered round the gallery in increasing dismay. I tried to speak words of praise, but they stuck in my throat. I looked miserably at all their foolish curves and (to me) imbecile colours. 'How could he have bought the things?' I groaned inwardly. 'But,' I consoled myself, 'even the greatest can't be great all the time in

all directions.' Mr. Balfour watched me with charmed amusement. He laid a hand on my shoulder. 'You're the second who ever dared to say that,' he smiled. 'I didn't—I mean I said nothing.' 'Precisely—so did Whistler—but he had a boil at the back of his neck and couldn't wear a collar. It was like my unconquerable optimism to attribute his silence to a boil.'

There are two other occasions of Arthur Balfour, neither of strictly political kind, that I both remember and am entitled to record. They are both cast at No. 6 Whitehall Gardens, where the committee was housed. We had the great and nobly proportioned dining-room and a smaller room behind giving access to the garden. The garden stretched down to the Embankment parallel with that at No. 1, through which some years before I had walked to meet Sir Alfred Bateman, Mr. Austin Dobson and Mr. Edmund Gosse. It was, I think, late March or early April. At any rate, on the one hand the sun was gilding the sundial in the middle of the rank grass, and the lilacs in the dimmest of green glimmered enviously at the buds spurting like matches on the almond-trees. It was late March or early April, because on the one hand the committee had achieved little, and on the other I had seen Mr. Balfour about three times a week. Familiarity had not bred contempt.

I was walking in the garden to clear my head. We had been grubbing at statistics till four in the morning and a little fresh air did no harm before the meeting of the sub-committee, which consisted of Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Balfour and one or two others. I must have forgotten the time in contemplation of the almond-blossom, because I saw J. H. Phillips—my devoted helper—waving to me frantically from the terrace. I raced up the garden to find the committee assembling. They took their places, and I, as secretary, sat behind the chairman and Mr. Balfour. The subject under discussion was sufficiently unimportant and dull to bear mention nineteen years later without serious evasion of the Official Secrets Act. Nevertheless *ex abundanti cautela* I will invent a subject and say that we were discussing the price which could properly be paid for khaki trousers—purchased by the five-million pairs. You are to imagine a general atmosphere of strained boredom in which most committees were conducted during the War, strained because conscience kept repeating, ‘Don’t you know there’s a war on?’ and boredom because the weary mind replied, ‘Only too well.’ Each of the distinguished persons present had stated his view on the vital questions of seams, button-holes and buttons. It was Mr. Balfour’s turn to speak. He brought to the consideration of pants exactly the same

abstract courtesy and directed inattention with which he habitually approached all problems. Nothing was either great or small, provided that it afforded reasonable intellectual exercise. A secretary came into the room bringing a dispatch-box for the chairman. If anybody had looked at the newcomer they would have noticed that he was unusually agitated. Nobody looked, however. He made to whisper in Mr. Lloyd George's ear, but was motioned to silence for fear of interrupting the speaker. Mr. Balfour was logically arguing the merits of tin against composition buttons. There were many aspects of importance—the shortage of tin for other purposes, the importance of trousers remaining in position during the march, the effect of rain upon composition. Mr. Balfour had then addressed himself to the relevant question of price. Mr. Lloyd George had in the meantime unlocked his case. He took out a single sheet and I heard a movement. I looked round. He was sitting back in his chair, pale, with angry eyes. He gave me the paper to hand to Mr. Balfour. As I was uncertain whether I was intended to interrupt him (and moved by plentiful curiosity) I read it. Mr. Balfour was saying, 'In the matter of an additional halfpenny,' when I laid my hand on his arm. He stopped, politely vexed, adjusted his pince-nez and read, '*Lusitania* sunk off

South Coast of Ireland. Heavy loss of life.' His face maintained unmoved its expression of polite interest. He laid the paper down. 'As I was saying,' he continued, in his cool, easy voice, 'in the matter of an additional halfpenny, we must not let the comparative insignificance of the monetary unit involved affect the question of principle.'

My acquaintance with Lord Kitchener may perhaps be described as slight. It consisted, as the emissary of the committee, in standing nervously at the edge of his room, almost in my extreme terror backing against the door, while he exclaimed in a deep, meaningless voice, 'What.' I do not even know whether this oracular monosyllable was directed to me or to the soldier who introduced me. At any rate the word seemed to have a meaning for him, because he ushered me out again instantly. 'I'm sorry,' he said. 'My fault. I must have got the time wrong.' 'But my committee want to know,' said I. 'K. won't worry much about that,' replied the soldier. 'I shall be seeing Mr. Balfour in four minutes; I'll speak to him.' 'Yes, do,' said the young man, sitting down at his desk.

I walked across to Whitehall Gardens, boiling hopelessly. The information for which I had been dispatched was vital and needed urgently. Nobody but Kitchener could give it. He had towered at me from



the other end of the room like a Michelin advertisement of himself. Nobody could be so tall, so broad, so monosyllabic. 'I don't believe he was there at all,' I said to myself indignantly. 'It was just a huge façade in polychrome, a great doll that they worked from behind. The Kitchener of Soudan, of the blockhouses, of the impenetrable majesty and desert dignity, the Kitchener "who Wants You" wasn't there. He must, like another deity, be asleep or on a journey. In his place, vague and vast by the little statue of Napoleon, haunted his spectre, who muttered "What" in answer to persons charged by Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Balfour with an all-important mission.'

I could have wept. I didn't because as I flounced into my room at No. 6 I discovered that Mr. Balfour was there writing tranquilly at my table in his large and diffusive handwriting. He sat with his back to the great window. The light chiselled his greyhound lines. He looked up and read my news in my face. 'Ah,' he said, rising to his feet, 'foolish of me. I meant to come along with you, I should have let you know. K. must have been expecting me.' 'He wasn't expecting me,' I said, already more than half restored to self-confidence by his impeccable calm. 'Tell me,' he said. 'Well, sir,' I replied, 'the secretary took me in and I stood by the door.' 'Near to the door?' inquired Mr. Balfour.

'Almost up against it,' I replied. 'Kitchener was standing by the mantelpiece like—' I paused. 'The Himalayas on a wet day,' suggested a serene voice. 'Exactly,' I said. 'He glared at a panel in the door about three feet above my head, then said, "What."'

'A word more,' said Mr. Balfour, 'than Lord Burleigh used.' 'Then sir,' I said, 'I left.' He looked at me with a very unusual expression compounded of laughter and warning. 'This never happened,' he said. 'Enough personal bothers without this. I told you that I was doing it myself. But,' he added relaxing wholly into a smile, 'I wish that a "what" of mine had such force. They have a name in electricity, haven't they?' 'Yes,' said I, immensely gratified and completely happy, 'a kilowatt.' 'How suitable an accentuation of the pronouns of Field-M Marshals,' he murmured. 'And now,' he added, 'have you noticed my trousers?' I looked at them with some embarrassment. They certainly were unusually light in tone; indeed one might almost have called them white. 'I hadn't noticed anything,' I said untruthfully. 'No?' said Mr. Balfour. 'They didn't, for example, seem a little whiter than my habit, a little gay?' 'Well,' I said, 'perhaps they are lighter in colour than usual.' 'As I feared,' sighed he, 'as I feared.' At which point Mr. Lloyd George entered with very dark trousers and black gloves. 'You're

coming to poor X's funeral, aren't you, Balfour?' he said with the ball tucked under his arm, just ready to touch down. 'Why no,' said Mr. Balfour; 'you see my trousers are inappropriate. Wolfe was just saying how very white they were.' The half-back twinkled. 'X wouldn't notice if they were red, white and blue,' he observed. 'Ah, my dear Lloyd George,' said Mr. Balfour, 'consider my feelings.' Mr. Lloyd George contemplated the trousers. 'It was unlucky,' he said, 'that you didn't remember X when you put them on.' 'Wasn't it?' said Mr. Balfour. 'Well, could you spare four minutes to walk up Whitehall with me? I have something rather urgent to discuss,' replied the Chancellor.

They went out like a pylon with its dynamo. About ten minutes later Mr. Balfour returned alone to complete his paper. He was carrying a small bunch of violets in his hand. 'Would you be very kind and have these put in water,' he said with no expression in his voice—'a great deal of water. I have carried them down Whitehall. Mr. Lloyd George had them presented to me.'

He sat down and wrote, scratching out word after word. After three hours' work he had written what he would himself have called half a sheet of foolscap. I sent the half-sheet to be printed for circulation. It changed the course of English history.

## GHOSTS AT NO. 6 WHITEHALL GARDENS

IF you do not believe—and heaven knows why you should—that the Ministry of Munitions, that mixture of the Sanhedrin and a Bank Holiday crowd at Liverpool Street Station, ever existed, I will take you by the hand and lead you with quiet triumph to No. 6 Whitehall Gardens. Grey, elegant and untroubled, the house stands outwardly as though it were still the home and resort of fashion. The windows have their old air of easy proportion, and the entrance hall has a coolly rectilinear impertinence that all but scans you through a quizzing-glass. ‘Yes,’ I will say, ‘this is where the Ministry of Munitions began. There was,’ I shall add eagerly, looking at your dubious or wholly uninterested eyes, ‘there was such a Department during the war—huge, industrious, all important, greatly directed by great men under the impulse of the greatest of all. At one time its staff outnumbered the population of Wakefield; twenty hotels contrived in vain, with immense overcrowding, to house its enrolled multitudes; it was the largest property-owner in

the world; it built factories in a day and forgot them in a night; it acquired a county for the site of a new building, and lost the county, the site and the title-deeds next morning; it did all the work that fell to its share as well as all the work that fell to everybody else's share; it was actuated by advanced Socialist and by advanced anti-Socialist principles; it socialized huge sections of industry for purely capitalist reasons, and refused to interfere with others on purely Marxian grounds; it spent more in a day than the nation could repay in a century; and it was the Man Who Won the War, or the Man Who Mislaid it somewhere in a poison-gas factory. Yes,' I shall continue, holding you, like the Ancient Mariner, with my wild and glittering eye, 'there was such a Department. Indeed there was,' I shall add on a diminishing note. 'Or was there? Can such things have been?' On the instant I shall be intimidated by your incredulous gaze. 'Am I dreaming or losing my reason?' I shall ask myself. 'Such phenomena couldn't have existed. Only a madman could imagine them.' But, even as I relinquish your button-hole, the faces of those who helped to shoot the albatross surge back upon me. 'I can't have invented them too,' I say defiantly, and then desperately, 'Well, judge for yourselves!'

There must be some method in what

I attempt to reclaim in the desire to re-establish my sanity. At intervals a body of survivors invites the battered remnants to a feast in the ruins. At each of these functions, spaced over the years, the numbers shrink and the faces of those who attend are strangely altered. Some careless or malicious dresser has muddled their make-up. They are wearing the wrong wig, too grey or too hairless, their features are represented as having coarsened or contracted, their persons have swollen or ridiculously diminished and not even the expression in their eyes is the same. This gathering of familiar strangers or strange familiars only confuses me further. 'That wizened little man with bent shoulders,' I mutter to myself, 'who has feloniously stolen X's name, was never the boisterous loud-voiced Hammer of Hindenburg, the human Miölner tossed from the strong right hand of the Welsh Thor. And that—and that—and that,' I continue, seeing white moustaches, pouches under eyes, bald heads and doubtful gait. 'Is it possible that they are so changed, and, if so, perhaps I also——' But I forbear to look at the mirror. Instead I summon as witnesses to the existence of the Department some of those who no longer attend the banquet and upon whom Time has no longer power. They at least will return holding no masks before their faces, nor changing the voices that they had. They

will support me, returning to haunt where once they so eminently lived.

First then, since they precede the others in time, I recall from their distant quiet Sir Percy Girouard and Lord Moulton, two men to whom for different reasons England owes more than it will ever know. Sir Percy will enter with his characteristic movement. He will, I mean, clatter to the table in No. 6 where he has left his military belt and cap among the civilian coats, stamping like a horse about to leave his stable. 'Who wants me?' he will say, looking round over his shoulder, still like a horse. 'L. G.? Oh, very well!' He will adjust his eyeglass in his cold and prominent eye, and, muttering strange oaths under his breath, proceed to obey instructions.

As he often did: as he did, for example, one day at Manchester after Mr. Lloyd George had spoken to a great audience in the Free Trade Hall. A large suite had accompanied the Minister; not least among whom was the French-Canadian General and Ex-Governor by no means gratified at his inclusion in the tour. A special coach was put at the Minister's disposal by the Railway Company. He had, however, gone in advance by car and I was left with Sir Percy to accept the rather dampened homage presented by one of the Directors. Sir Percy tugged at his moustache, fixed his eyeglass

and rasped in a voice whose colour might be described as cracked walnut, 'No business of mine of course. Secretary's fault and that sort of thing. But anyhow we're on the job too. May as well be comfortable as not, what? Have a cigar?' In the train the secretaries sat like gentlemen's gentlemen in a small back cabin. The heroes sat in the main coach with the Coronas on the table and the plans all scattered with ash. Sir Frederick Donaldson, head of Woolwich Arsenal, was there, brought down to discuss production with the engineers of Manchester. Looking through the glass door one observed Sir Percy's face redly and menacingly near to the cool indifference of Sir Frederick's. He kept thrusting at him with his forefinger. Presently Sir Frederick, tired either of being prodded or stimulated, retired sulkily to a distant chair. Sir Percy wrote continuously with that slow painstaking movement of a boy in his Lower Third. The words, however, that he had scrawled heavily at the top of his first sheet were 'National Factories'. Sir Frederick had fallen asleep in his chair, but Sir Percy never ceased his labours till the train reached Manchester. Sir Frederick woke with a jerk, and looked round dazed, as though he had mislaid something. He had. It was Woolwich Arsenal, and Sir Percy had annexed it while he slept.

The crowd had, as it were, sobbed itself



quiet after the hysterical thunders with which it had followed Mr. Lloyd George's forked lightning. The chairman rose, and soothing the audience with his hand, like a doctor soothing a patient after a fit, announced that at Mr. Lloyd George's urgent request Sir Percy Girouard would say a few words to the meeting. Sir Percy Girouard was not explained to them. He was called upon, practically without warning, to speak in the uneasy silence after an electric storm. A disagreeable job, but orders were orders. He clanked to the front of the platform, and squared his stocky shoulders. 'Mr. Chairman and gentlemen,' he began, glaring at the latter fiercely through his eyeglass, and his voice, pumped rather than breathed out, rang strange after the dulcet scales that had but recently enchanted the air. 'I am a soldier and not an orator. But I am a French-Canadian, and I knew Sir Wilfred Laurier. If I hadn't known him I should have thought that great speakers couldn't be great men of action. He taught me better. That's why I'm here—under Mr. Lloyd George's orders.' The audience cheered. He held up his arm. 'Don't cheer yet,' he said. 'Wait till we've finished the job.' He sat down, but the audience disobeyed him. In any case it was not given to him to help to finish the job. But he returns as I saw him that day at

Manchester, with his head thrown back, croaking, like a courageous frog, at the night of which nobody could see the end. Mr. Chairman and gentlemen! Sir Percy Girouard was right after all. He was a soldier.

Lord Moulton, like Sir Percy Girouard, takes pride of place because his services anticipated the creation of the Ministry. It was at a meeting of the committee plunged in gloom because of information as to the possible failure of supply vital to the Armies that I first saw the great lawyer and the greater man of science. He flapped heavily into the room, looking and moving like nothing on earth so much as Tenniel's picture of the Mock Turtle. This appearance was accentuated by a shortness of neck and a habit of folding up what there was in a manner not common in humans. His voice, when he began to speak, had something of the richness of a good soup, but no man ever spoke with more sense or directness. On this occasion his words, to one pair of ears at any rate, rang like the call of the bagpipes at Lucknow. He was in his huge rolling way promising the impossible. As he sheathed his eyes with the heavy lids of a primeval lizard, it was difficult to believe the good news. When he opened them, however, there burned within them such cold grey fires as only the blind could resist. In fact

he performed, and more than performed, all that he had promised.

Lord Moulton, unlike many other reputations, had a specific genius, and not that generalized lack of applied knowledge which is described as the gift of organization. I had many interviews with captains of industry, from which I returned with the uneasy suspicion that if that was all they had to impart, then either (which was probable) they didn't trust me or (what was possible) they had succeeded in business because their only competitors were business men like themselves. I do not forget a great, almost the greatest, of American business men whom I was sent to interview with secrecy and urgency under the cover of night. When I received my instructions I didn't know whether he might be in the U.S.A., in France or in this country. I tracked him down in the afternoon at Folkestone on the point of leaving for France. With characteristic courtesy he agreed to wait till the next morning.

I chose for some melodramatic reason to go by car. As we throbbed out into Kent with dimmed headlights the chauffeur said that he could only keep even that amount of light going by racing the engine. I did not know then and I do not know now what racing the engine meant or means. But it was war-time, and I was on a mission, and

anyhow the car wasn't mine. Spiritually I folded my arms and adjusted my three-cornered hat. 'Race the engine,' I said curtly. We did and with the result that we raced into the ditch. Fortunately it was a time of tense emotion in which the mere mention of my chief's name produced another car at the nearest country house. But it was necessary to telephone to the Pavilion Hotel at Folkestone, explaining the reason for my delay and also to persuade the new chauffeur to keep the headlights on. If there is a Zeppelin raid, he objected, we shall be accused of being spies. There was, and we were, but at least we reached Folkestone before midnight.

The hotel lay in sheeted quiet with never a light showing, thus resembling the whole town. I was shown up to my host's apartment. He received me with that princely courtesy of which Arnold Bennett speaks in *Those United States*. He was not merely an amiably great man. He was a favourably disposed member of a ruling dynasty, receiving an emissary, however humble, of a friendly power with suitable international courtesy. Such poor drinks as the hotel afforded, his great gesture indicated, were at my command, and if, I reflected, there were larger cigars in the world they must be reserved for the use of elephants. When I had overcome the embarrassment naturally

experienced at finding oneself engaged in an hotel by the sea in tête-à-tête conversation at midnight with Royalty, I explained our difficulty as best I could. I had memorized battalions of figures in the hope of making a good impression. They appeared to make none whatever. I had acquired certain technical patois, which I hoped I now spoke almost with the native accent of the greasy spanner. There was no response. I had thought out a peroration of the kind that I had learned from literature was acceptable in the U.S. It did not appear to be accepted. My host leaned back in his chair and puffed at his cigar. The firelight (for there was only one lamp in the big room) threw almost a Red Indian shade on his broad grave brows. He removed his cigar. 'Get together,' he said, and then, 'Listen! When my father was running the money panic in 189— the bank presidents and commercial heads came to consult with him one evening about a quarter of nine o'clock. He had them shown into the drawing-room and had refreshments sent in. Then he locked the door from the outside and left them to reflect among themselves. At 2 a.m. he opened the door, and when they came out, they knoo one another.'

It was difficult to incorporate this—the only information I received—in my report, and though I should be the last to gainsay

the importance and interest of bank presidents knowing one another, I could not feel at the time that the solution of our problem had been materially advanced. I was not sure, I reflected miserably in the cold air of Kent next morning, that my great host really understood the problem and, as the car dashed through Tonbridge, I began to wonder whether I had understood it myself. That, however, was not the kind of organizer Lord Moulton was. He had some of that sort about him, naturally, because you cannot, if you understand me, do business without business men. But that was not his affair. He was concerned with understanding and overreaching the stubborn objectivity of nature. Under the savage intensity of his gaze facts uneasily divested themselves of their clothes of custom, and put away their pretences. When asked for information he gave it according to the intelligence of his questioner. When I think of the devastating lucidity of his expositions to me, I ask myself exactly why he was at such pains to be so abundantly clear. I was, of course, the Minister's agent, but——

Here then, are two chairs very high up that should be left vacant at the next reunion, but I doubt whether they had better be placed side by sides. Let them be separated perhaps by Lord Curzon, who had his brief association with the Ministry as

its representative for a few months in the House of Lords. It was a day or two after the formation of the new Government, and the actual day upon which the new Minister had settled into No. 6. The excellent messenger at the front door, used to the rural quiet of the house, was overwhelmed by men bringing furniture, postmen bringing sacks of letters, inventors bringing anything from bales of cloth to some of the smaller parts of heavy siege artillery, members of the public with grievances and others soon to acquire them, Government officials looking for their rooms their chiefs and their work, and, last, Members of the Government hurrying or strolling up the stone stairs according as to whether they were new to the Cabinet or not. While the hubbub raged outside and miraculously, in the absence of traffic-lights, there were no major accidents, there sat within doors a Council of three—Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Kitchener and Lord Curzon. What the subject of their deliberations was had not been imparted. It was so secret indeed that some one had suggested that they did not know themselves. Meanwhile, I sat in my office—a large room with one chair which I relinquished to callers—interviewing super-men on the Minister's behalf. By all accounts England was thick with them. Hardly a man, who trooped up the stairs, but was a born

organizer or one, as Cyril Asquith said, able to cope with the national crisis owing to his long experiences of crises in his private affairs.

From time to time the bell from the inner room rang, and I crept in only to be assured on each occasion that it had rung by mistake. The Conference of the Three indeed broke up because owing to some error in the wiring the bell kept summoning the most unlikely people from all parts of the building. Presently Lord Curzon, to whom I had been presented, came out and stood in my room looking out of the window into Whitehall Gardens. I jumped to my feet to offer my chair. He turned his strange, lemon-shaped head in my direction, giving me the impression as he looked at me that I was one of a very large number of eager young men with untidy black hair anxious to attract his notice. In fact, as I came to know, that look as of one gazing down at earth from a cloud was strictly and simply due to his being nearly always raised to a great height on a pillar of pain. This rather than proconsular arrogance isolated him from ordinary human contacts. This, however, I did not know, and I confess that, as I looked at him, I could almost see the elephant on which he rode, the gaily canopied howdah and perhaps the mahout leaning forward with a jewelled ankus in his hand. He did



not appear to notice my offer of the chair. He turned back to the window with a smile that did not so much light as shadow his face. Presently he called to me. 'Come here and look,' he said. We gazed out at the tumult. Two Office of Works men had just upset a large cupboard and were discussing the mishap in the frank unembarrassed way that the British workman shares with the British aristocrat. Women and men, out-bound emigrants passing their returning predecessors, flowed in two streams. Here and there a face that seemed familiar eddied above the throng. Surely that head of a Roman Emperor must be John Redmond, but what would he want here? And could that be—but surely it couldn't—looking like another Roman Emperor, but one elected by the Pretorian Guard from gladiatorial candidates, Lord Northcliffe?

Lord Curzon stood in silence for a time, and, as I did not know what was expected of me, I stood by his side. The crowds subsided and now a few isolated figures strolled across the space with an air of considerable assurance. First of the little group, leaning on Bonham-Carter's arm, was the newly appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer. Seen from above by some trick of refraction his face bore an expression of Chinese self-satisfaction—an emotion to which no person

appointed Chancellor at that moment could have been prey. I do not remember what others followed him, but I do remember Lord Curzon taking a deep breath and speaking to me almost for the first time since he had entered my room. 'Ah,' he said, 'I perceive a further inrush of Cabinet Ministers. And one,' he added, 'will shortly be crushed by that cupboard—a strange doom. No! he has escaped it. It is, we must suppose, God's will.' He left me to greet his colleagues. The cheerful abuse of the workmen and sundry violent hammerings were all that remained to suggest the august company that I had so lately entertained.

A few weeks later I was sent to Carlton Gardens to explain details of the brief supplied as the basis of his speech in the House of Lords. I was admitted to the great room where he was awaiting me. He did not rise but pointed to his foot. There was no question but that he was in pain. It seemed indeed to me that he only contrived to keep his head upright and in that particular position by a juggling feat. It was not so much set between his shoulders as cleverly, and rather breathlessly, balanced there. There was no Viceregal splendour in his manner, nor any fear that I might forget that the suffering figure before me was Lord Curzon of Kedleston. He even began by chuckling about Mr. Balfour's Burne-Jones's.

'You had the courage not to like them,' he said. 'You should go far—though,' he said, looking at me reflectively, 'I can't be sure in what direction. What do you think of his metaphysics? A. J. B.'s I mean.' 'Well,' I said nervously, 'I think, that is, I thought, they were like Mr. Haldane's—a little impromptu. I mean, you can't vamp epistemology.' He shifted his leg with a slight grimace. 'Nor statesmanship,' I thought that he muttered, but I may have been wrong. 'Picking out the absolute with one finger wouldn't be your way?' he said, speaking out loud. 'No! Well! Will you have tea or whisky?' We both took tea. 'Now,' he said, 'tell me.' I went through the details point by point, at first slowly, then quicker at his request, but, however quickly, never too quick. His mind moved like an elephant. It looked ponderous but it was extremely swift and silent. After about three-quarters of an hour he said, 'Let me go over the points.' He presented me with a flawless *aide-mémoire*. 'Is that right?' he asked. 'Admirable,' I said. 'Good,' he replied; 'just one point—you keep bringing in Addison's name. What has the Essayist to do here? It is an amiable literary diversion but unexpected.' 'Not Joseph Addison, Lord Curzon, but Dr. Addison.' 'Ah, and who then is Dr. Addison?' 'Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Munitions,' I

replied. 'A member of our Government,' said Lord Curzon. 'Dear me! You are not, I see, merely widely read, but possess a mine of general information. Come again soon!'

That stately ghost will not bring to the Reunion the burden of his pain, his disappointment and his unremitting devotion to an ideal as unintelligible to his colleagues as would be a thirteenth-century Crusader who had stumbled into a Hollywood film-crusade. His contact with the Ministry was too brief to earn the dubious right to that fellowship. He belongs, I think, in another and older Valhalla. He fades to make way for the dark and enigmatic eyes of Edwin Montagu, shrine of all the useless wisdom of his race, its tragic doubt, its secular sensitiveness and its prevision of doom. I saw him first on the day that he addressed the heads of the office on his appointment to office of Minister. Long before his time the Minister had been drifted off on the rising tide of staff, first to a new office building in Whitehall Place and thence into the gilded reaches of the Hotel Metropole. It was in the dining-room of that last outpost of the mid-Victorian age that Mr. Montagu, pale as Pierrot, rose to catch the reflection in absurd mirrors of two eyes that had taken refuge in his face from some other and unknown face. As always, he screened them for a second before speaking with the dark

comfort of their lids. Like Sir Percy Girouard he used an eyeglass, but where the General used his for a sort of cock-robin offensive, Edwin Montagu hid behind his, like an orchid sheltered under glass. He moved the cord restlessly in his fingers; then followed a curious motion of his tongue as though he were licking up words as an anteater catches flies, and then suddenly he spoke in a soft husky voice, half-way between a great actress and trouble with the tonsils. 'Gentlemen,' he began, 'I cannot hope to rival, I can only faintly aspire to imitate my great predecessor.' He said more after this, but these words affected me most then, and still remain in my mind. There could be no doubt that the words, partly and even accurately, expressed one aspect of the speaker's mind. But no faintest ray illuminated the dark of his eyes. They looked—no other word will fit—stagnant, like old deserted pools with no life in their deeps. They were utterly divorced from his speech. They did not so much repudiate as dissolve it. It was, in fact, impossible both to listen to his words and to look at his eyes. Because they cancelled out, and you were left with a hint of chaos.

The War was prolific of departments, committees, boards and commissions. The old departments peered—a row of Queen Anne houses—in meek astonishment at a wilderness of insecure sky-scrappers towering above

their modest heads. Hardly a phase of the nation's life but had its appropriate avenue of disorganized expenditure. It was not surprising therefore that a new Board with immense impetus and no particular direction appeared simultaneously with Mr. Montagu's appointment, nor was it more strange that its object, in so far as it possessed one, was one of the objects specifically assigned to Mr. Montagu. It was, however, strange that (perhaps through some confusion of names) I found myself appointed secretary to this Board with one of the senior Cabinet Ministers as my chairman. Mr. Montagu was consulted as to whether he would agree to my transfer. He asked not unnaturally for a day in order to consider the matter. It would be easier, he indicated, to decide when he had discovered who I was, or, as he added with a caution due to his knowledge of war-time efficiency, whether indeed there was a person of that name in existence. A day was granted him, though it was hinted that, till the Board functioned, the issues of the War hung in the balance.

Mr. Montagu learned upon inquiry that there was indeed such a person as myself under his jurisdiction. Conflicting views as to my abilities and indeed as to my integrity reached him from various quarters. There was, for example, on the unfriendly side a certain Major Fitz-Bones, an improbable

name, but no more improbable than the real one. He was in private life a commission agent, but he had studied the best models, with the result that he puffed his moustache, blew out his red cheeks and shouted as though (on several occasions) he had held the Khyber Pass single-handed. It was doubtful, indeed, whether he had any right to his rank, indeed to his uniform, but, as some one justly observed, what was one major among so many? Let us be grateful, he added, that he had not elected himself a Brigadier.<sup>1</sup>

This person was of the 'push and go' variety much in demand during the early days of the War. What in fact he pushed, except his private affairs, and whither he was going was not clear. But what he said was as legible as block capitals. 'Cut out the cackle,' he bellowed, and get down to the 'osses. What we want isn't talk,' he howled, 'it's the man with the order-book.' And finally, like all the Bulls of Bashan in chorus, 'Happen to know that there's a war on?' Such ejaculations as these naturally secured him respect and responsibility. He was always prepared with a hard-headed opinion on every subject and, as his opinion was always wrong, he was much consulted. Acting on advice Mr.

<sup>1</sup> Like the man in Notts, whose face was just a mass of spots. Vide *Poems on Geddesville*.

Montagu consulted him. Mr. Montagu was assured that I was not merely a German, but positively a Jew. Mr. Montagu adjusted his monocle. 'Is it possible?' he murmured. 'Fact, I assure you,' exploded the Major. 'Why, you've only to look at him.' 'Yes,' drawled Mr. Montagu; 'in that case I had better look at him. Oh, and Major, do, if you can find it in your heart, show a little indulgence to us Jews.' No less damaging to my prospect of transfer was the wholly unfounded allegation of my popularity as a negotiator. But the authority here was Sir Thomas Munro, who not merely never spoke ill of any one, but invented with every detail of veracity the most fantastic virtues in the least deserving. He had in mind, I imagine, 6 a.m. on Hackney Marshes when I addressed a crowd of strikers from an up-turned tub. It appeared, later, that my speech had merely made the whole shift, who had been returning to work, twenty minutes late, but this, after all, Sir Thomas Munro was entitled to urge, did not distinguish me from other able strike-settlers. Sir Thomas Munro was supported in other quarters, but nowhere, in Mr. Montagu's view, so strongly as by Major Fitz-Bones (peace be to his ashes!). The Minister accordingly sent for me to announce his decision.

I have no knowledge of, or desire to



express an opinion on, Indian affairs. I cannot guess whether Mr. Montagu saved or ruined our dominion there. I do not know whether General Dyer deserved the Sword of Honour presented to him by the *Morning Post* or to be dismissed the Army. But I do know that I could almost have read in Montagu's eyes that ugly scene when the packed gangsters howled him down in the House of Commons. I could have foretold, I think, that Fate had just that cad's trick up its sleeve. I saw a sensitiveness so exquisite, so almost shuddering that I should have known that Fate could never have resisted the temptation to punish him for his unlikeness to the herd. He looked as he always looked, bowed under the weight of his thought, and as always his dark eyes seemed to be turned away from the light, like the backs of escaping slaves. He smiled, though, when I came in. 'They have been telling me shocking things about you, Mr. Wolfe,' he said. His smile and the dark warm note in his voice reassured me. 'Have they, Minister?' I asked cheerfully. 'Indeed they have,' he replied. 'They tell me,' he said, dangling his monocle, 'they tell me that you are positively a Jew. Is such a thing possible?' A happy relief flooded my being. This was the sort of Minister with whom I could do. I remembered Max Beerbohm's famous witticism and altered it (without

confessing the origin!) 'Not only possible, Minister,' I said, 'but certain. And not only a Jew, but the worst kind of Jew.' 'What kind of Jew is that?' he inquired. I looked into the mirror over his shoulder. 'A Red Indian Jew,' I replied meekly. 'You have said it!' he answered. 'You damn well stay here and no nonsense about transfer.' 'Yes, Minister,' I said. 'Yes, Mr. Wolfe,' he mimicked me, 'and if it's salary you're thinking of I dare say it might be arranged.' 'It was not that only,' I said; 'I wanted to say that I wanted ——' 'That's two wanteds,' he interrupted. 'Well,' I said, 'I meant that I'd changed my mind. I wanted to stay—now.' He said nothing. It was like him, as I afterwards discovered, to say nothing when he was pleased.

In his epigram on Four Ministers of Munitions H. W. Garrod wrote thus:

The small and great stretch here their length:  
The Nabob here and Hoxton's son  
Lie down with Churchill's clawing strength  
And George, the Hammer of the Hun.

Garrod had experience of all four, and his eyes, in the face of Puck painted by Hogarth, were not often misled either by enthusiasm or by cynicism. It was he who, tottering up Whitehall from having been rejected for active service for the fifth time, was offered a white feather by some *tricoteuse* with the

words, 'Don't you know that young men like you are dying in France for civilization?' Flattered though he was at being fallaciously described as young, he instantly replied, as he pinned on the white feather, 'And, madam, don't you know that I am the civilization for which they are dying?' He was very nearly right, because he and his kind by their civility in the face of uproar, their inaccessibility both to panic and applause, and their unswerving preoccupation with things fair and immutable stood—and earth's foundations stay. Nevertheless, like others concerned first with thought and only with action in so far as it reflects thought, Garrod had, I think, an unconscious predisposition to praise what he did not practise. Carlyle wrote heaven knows how many clamorous volumes in eulogy of strong silent men, himself noticeably falling short both of strength and silence. In a very different degree it may be that precisely because Montagu—the Nabob—had some of the quiet of Eastern contemplation Garrod, who had it too, gave the palm over him to the outright Westerners. Nor, I think, would Montagu, remembering Churchill's typically Prince Rupert intervention on that tragic day in Parliament have grudged Garrod his preference for the North-east wind of politics. But for my part if there were any ghost to which I could bend a knee, it would

be Edwin Montagu's. He would come slowly and heavily up the stone stairs, and when he saw me his eyes, baffling wells of darkness, would glitter for an instant with the returning dawn. And if he saw that I offered him a knee, he would look for an instant and then pass to the place which, if I had my way, would be at the table's head. But he would say nothing as he noted that there was one at least not too poor to do him reverence. Because, as you remember, it was his habit to say nothing when he was pleased.

After these I would summon from the vast deep shades two Under-Secretaries, Neil Primrose and F. G. Kellaway, men as different in their lives as in the manner of their deaths. I had first seen Primrose many years before at some dinner at Oxford which his father—the legendary Lord Rosebery—had addressed. The speech was nothing, though the voice, through which rolling drums were heard, was something. But the man was the Alcibiades of the modern world. Everything mortal he had attained and put away. He had, it must be assumed, found something more acceptable than these shadows. From the great quiet and wisdom that he had attained he condescended (so I thought) to humanity. It was overwhelming, and not less overwhelming as I heard him say, as he passed me by with his son. 'Come along, Neil. Don't

keep me.' He had, I supposed, some improbable tryst, and Neil didn't keep him. Because about an hour or two later Neil and a few friends went about industriously removing the sign-boards from the various public-houses in Oxford. It took them, I remember, about a week before they found the King's Head again.

I did not, I admit, when I attended on Mr. Primrose, expect him first to dot me one and then, hallooing vigorously, to jump out of the window through the skylight into the copying room. For he had already been an Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office in a previous administration. I was not, however, prepared for so much dignity and for a self-possession which would not have disgraced the Pope. I found later that this was in part a façade assumed in dismay when he observed my comparatively tender years. He had been accustomed everywhere to be the youngest person at every conference. Still less than thirty, he took it ill that anybody whatever should be younger still. The breach which this unfortunate accident occasioned, would, I think, never have been healed had he not discovered that I ventured to share his opinion of that member of the Geddes family who had at the moment settled on the Ministry of National Service. Mr. Primrose laboured under the mistaken impression that

General Auckland Geddes was originally a member of the dental profession. Nothing that I could do would disabuse his mind of this misconception. 'Don't tell me,' he would grumble. 'Just look at him.' I told him haughtily that looking at General Geddes was no part of my official obligations. From that moment he forgave me my age.

Of all junior Ministers he was the most conscientious and hardest-working. His displeasing habit was to be at the office between 8.30 and 9, and he might, if it occurred to him, stay till the same hour in the evening. But he had numerous interests outside the official that gave his queer marble-blue eyes a look almost of surprise as though he were always seeing some one or something unexpected over your shoulder. Politics had a share, but the chief distraction was a feeling that he ought to be where his yeomen were in the East. 'What right have we,' he said to me suddenly when we were poring over some file, 'what right have we to be sitting here instead of being killed like everybody else of our age?' 'Aren't we perhaps preventing a certain number from being killed?' I answered. 'We hope so, we pretend so, perhaps we even think so. But I don't like it—and if they try to yank me into politics proper you won't be able to see me for the dust.' 'What about me?' I asked. 'I thought you were medically

rejected?' 'So I was—twice—but, I dare say, if I tried very hard, I could persuade some doctor to pass me.' 'I should try very hard,' he said.

I went into his room shortly before he was appointed Chief Whip on the formation of Mr. Lloyd George's Government. I was introduced to a formidable Member of Parliament by the name of Sir Max Aitken. I observed, though I was only in the room three minutes, that he called Mr. Primrose by his Christian name two or three times and mentioned four or five other eminent persons in the same way. When I went in later I mentioned the visitor. 'Doesn't he know any surnames' I asked, 'or is he only asked to use them when people know him well enough?' 'You lay off that man, my child,' he said. 'You're too fond of looking for trouble, and if you find him in your way you'll find Mount Everest. It won't be long before people are asking to call him by his middle name and get chucked out on their middle ear for cheek.' 'What's he been to see you about?' I asked. 'It will not be in the public interest,' he answered, 'to reply to that question.'

A month later I went to see him in the Chief Whip's room at No. 12. While I was there the telephone rang continuously, because the minor appointments in the new Government were still unsettled. 'No,' I heard him say,

'there isn't room. I'm terribly sorry, we're complete.' He put down the receiver. 'What about the job of Chief Whip?' I asked. 'Couldn't he have that?' 'Anybody can,' he said, 'next week.' 'Are you really going?' 'Really.' 'Why?' Weariness fell from his face as suddenly as though he had taken off a wax mask to show the bright and living face below. 'A man's got to live sometime,' he said. 'And die,' I put in. 'Absent thee from felicity awhile,' he grinned, and shook my hand warmly. 'Give my love to the dentist,' he shouted to my retreating back, 'if you see him.' The next time that I heard of him was in the list of 'Killed'.

Heart, you were never hot,  
Nor large, nor full like hearts made great with  
'shot'.

Mr. Kellaway, on the other hand, ended his distinguished political career, which included among other offices that of Postmaster-General, as Vice-Chairman of the Marconi Company.

Many other ghosts there are who will throng back till a year comes when the reunion can more conveniently be held on the other side of the Styx. And many there are who are not my ghosts. There remains one, however, who I will on no account permit to make his temporal modesty eternal. I beg an exeat from Charon for Sir Thomas



Munro, and I beg at the same time that my nerves may not be harrowed by his being permitted to leave the ferry in a taxi. Because it is my belief—and the belief of all unprejudiced observers—that until a motor-car was forced upon him, bitterly protesting, his average taxi bill per diem was in the neighbourhood of £2. All the years of the War he was dying on his feet, but that didn't prevent his putting in about ten hours a day at the office. Only it happened about three times a week that he felt persuaded that he wouldn't be able to last the day. This led to his arriving in a taxi, which he kept waiting. He would come, breathing heavily, into my room. 'I've only come to say that I shan't be staying,' he would begin, sinking into a chair. 'Heart again, Sir Tom? How rotten. You ought to have stayed in bed.' 'I know. What's that file you've got?' 'Oh, nothing. Don't bother. We'll manage.' 'Yes, but what is it?' 'Well, actually it's one of yours.' 'I'd better see it.' 'You'll never go if you do.' 'I'll keep my coat on.' 'And the taxi waiting, I suppose.' By this time he was engrossed; gradually he removed his coat, his muffler and his gloves. 'I'll just have to have a word with MacDonald about this,' and had escaped before anything could be done. Phillips would appear at 1.15. 'Sir Thomas wants to know if you'll lunch with him at the National

Club?' (alas, no longer at No. 1 Whitehall Gardens). 'Of course; but is that d—d taxi still there?' It was. Believe me, he was capable of keeping it during lunch and then bringing it back. 'If ever you commit a murder,' Gordon Campbell said, 'I shall tell the police to go round London looking for a house outside which there is a taxi showing £8 5s. on the meter. Within will be discovered the murderer.'

Sir Thomas—County Clerk of Lanarkshire—was not very like a murderer either in looks or ways. Indeed, if there had been any necessity for this, nature would have stood up in him and said, 'This is what I mean by not a murderer.' He radiated a kind of happy wisdom; his modesty was perfectly unfathomable, his generosity immeasurable, and his family circumstances the happiest that I have ever encountered. It was difficult indeed to know where he lived, because he appeared to have a suite at the Central Station Hotel, Glasgow, a house at Hamilton, rooms at the North British, a bedroom at the National Club and a sleeper of which he had apparently a seven and fourteen years' lease on the London and North Western Railway. Whatever the state of his health or his business he would not be parted one moment longer than State business demanded from his wife and daughters. If they were coming to London he felt it

incumbent on him to fetch them, if they were returning he accompanied them. And all the time his heart was beating more and more ominously, so that his breathing at times hurt our hearts too.

In Conference he was irresistible. His voice had the faintest touch of the Edinburgh mode. With him it was an added grace. It suggested not an accent, but powder on a wig. Inevitably he suggested my Lord Advocate walking out with his daughter in the Meadows. He had just that kindly look for his scapegrace Dauvit—just that cock of a wise eye as the clouds chased over Castle Hill. ‘You’re tired,’ he would say; ‘I’ll take the meeting.’ They would begin by trying to quarrel with him, to ruffle him, to dislike him. But how quarrel, ruffle and dislike Chaucer’s knight? ‘I will be perfectly frank with you,’ he would say and they believed him. How could they help themselves. I knew the facts—and I believed him. Indeed, sometimes the facts believed him too—and yielded to their belief.

It seems to me, looking back, that the last time I saw him was at a dinner that a few of those escaping from Government Service gave me at the end of the War. Two of the best five-minutes speeches that I ever heard or ever will hear had been delivered by Cyril Asquith and Garrod, the two wittiest after-dinner speakers in England. Then Sir

Thomas rose. 'I will be perfectly frank with you,' he said—and when the cheers had subsided added, 'I liked the young man.' I tried to get up and thank him. I couldn't then. I can't now.

LUNCHEON AT THE VILLA  
LAMMERMOOR

I CAN never remember whether it is the route or the rue de Lausanne. Which-ever it may be it is a long and dusty road, not unknown to tram-cars and hideously invaded by droves of motor-cars during the week-ends. But these things—and all other plebeian circumstances—are masked, and then banished, by the high wall that guards the great park of the Villa. None enters that heavy gate unless distinction, a mission, a reputation or pleasing youth command the benevolence of the owner. But that benevolence, once excited, is as calm as the lawns, as grateful as the shade of the umbrageous trees and as murmurous as the doves that constantly haunt them.

In the spring it would be difficult to find a happier conspiracy of nature and artifice than presented by the Villa's policies. The tree-enriched turf stretches smoothly to the water's edge. The lake has that curious intensity of blue at the edges, as though they were storing it for use later in the

year. Here and there on the bosom of the waves a vessel with double lateen sails stoops whitely about its hidden business of carrying stone or gravel. On the farther shore beyond the hotels and the little brave hill of the Cathedral the double Salève—cub and lioness—brood benevolently upon Geneva, their town. Away to the left the Voirons stretch their huge green flanks of pumas at rest, and between—on high blue days—the White Mountain of Europe magnificently confronts the eye.

In the garden of the Villa at such a time it is the hour of snow. Now, even if of three-score years and ten, fifty will not come again, it is well to see the blossom on these trees. Nor less well to watch the white instructed flutter of the wheeling doves, to observe how—proudest of birds—the white peacock moves to the mill-wheel of his argent fan, and to remark how, mirrored in the water, the white swans like ploughs blown backward, navigate the stream. Is it matter for surprise, then, if one permitted to spend long and leisured hours with pencil and paper by the lake has none but ravished memory? Not for him to join with those who, after luncheon or dinner unequalled, retreat to the bars of their hotels, and while they purchase cocktails out of allowances provided by their Governments, mock at their hostess. ‘Lion-hunter’ they call her, poor little

jackals who could never have been hunted by one in quest of such game unless blind, deaf and devoid of the sense of smell. Nor if great men were her weakness is it for the little, who crept under her wing, to complain. There is a tale of a young man who having his attention called by her to the rue Barton stammered, 'Ah! I see. You were called after the street.' If there had been such a young man, and if he had so far forgotten courtesy, there would have been a pause and then an invitation to visit the Villa. 'I collect insatiably,' she would murmur. 'You must let me add you.' In what capacity, and representing what, the young man would ruefully wonder. But he would go to lunch.

Not that it is possible to deny the epic of the League Building. But why deny it? Since the triumph of the Villa Lammermoor over the embattled forces of the world makes Ajax of no account. A knowledge of the geography of the lakeside is necessary fully to grasp the significance of the struggle. A plan should have been appended of the kind now habitual in novels of detection. Here, for example, would be marked the living-room, and here, presumably with a communicating door, the dying-room, marked with an X which shows the position of the corpse. The corpse on this occasion would be the hope that the League Council

cherished of using the territory of the Villa Lammermoor for their building.

The site was all that the International heart could desire. In the adjoining property the offices of the International Labour Office—the little sister of the League—were resting. Albert Thomas—Director of the Office—under the soft and wooing sky of Rome had hypnotized the Governing Body one spring day into voting the funds required to give a stone embodiment to his vision of Labour set free. Little did it matter that a painstaking Swiss architect had so far misunderstood the Director's object as to produce what seemed a cinema-producer's guess at Sing-Sing. There, at least, stood in reinforced concrete the reply to the abstractions of the Third International.

It seemed not merely natural but inevitable that the adjoining property should provide the site for the League Building. Twins by the lakeside would tower the palaces of peace. Neither winter Bise nor summer heat, striking sharp across the lake, should ever disturb and distract those institutions which grew (rather rapidly) in beauty side by side. The present writer is wholly ignorant of the course of the negotiations. He is disposed, however, to make a guess, having some knowledge of the methods of one of the High Contracting-out Parties. A sub-committee, it is therefore conjectured,



suitably top-hatted and rosetted would, after duly announcing its object, attend at the Villa. They would pace solemnly into the great drawing-room full of memories bestowed by half the eminent of the world. The members of the committee would smile amiably in anticipation of an easy, polite mission, accompanied, as they could observe, by all that was most potable already displayed in glittering profusion on a number of side-tables. Even the French member, who knew the only real objection to cocktails—that they disturb the palate—would perhaps be prepared to take that risk in so noble a cause. ‘Ah, madam,’ he would say, rising as the tall and gracious figure entered, ‘la vôtre est la vraie diplomacie.’ ‘La mienne?’ ‘Mais oui!’ pointing to the side-tables, *in vino caritas*. ‘Vous le croyez, monsieur. Mais l’espoir et la foi?’ ‘Elles sont peut-être absentes pour l’instant.’ ‘Prenez garde—puisque les absents ont toujours droit.’

Yes, I imagine, with just that touch of the eighteenth century negotiations would commence. The rapiers would meet, flash and shiver in the first shock. Both wrists would be conscious of a performer of the first force. What next? They had come to propose to Madam—whose affection for the League was a matter of legend—the opportunity of giving one more of the innumerable proofs

of that affection that she had already vouchsafed. 'A matter of legend,' I conceive her murmuring. 'The Lorelei of the League—a difficult and, it seems to me, a rocky situation.' One of the delegates of a less polished nation would intervene to say that in the matter of terms—if these were at issue—she would not find them unyielding. 'You mean,' she would say, 'that I am to sell my principles.' 'But impossible, madam,' would come the shocked retort; 'you have misunderstood. There is here no question of principle. It is only a matter of a house and a garden.' 'And,' she would say, 'suppose a house and a garden were a woman's principles?'

I repeat that all this is in the highest degree conjectural and could and, if necessary, would be confuted by a hundred *procès-verbaux* and *comptes rendus*. But believe me! a good guess is worth a ton of official records. I see them, therefore, retreating a little puzzled, though having accepted an invitation to dine. 'Les principes d'une femme: Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? Question de principe je comprends, mais question de principe de femme! Ça non, par exemple.' Nevertheless the woman's question of principle persisted—and in the end prevailed. Committees sat and reported sternly to other committees which in turn reported back with an even greater sternness. Suggestions of great

severity were rigidly discussed, steps were initiated, *démarches* proposed, ultimata were even discussed. Two or three hundred architects formed a committee to consider the rival plans submitted. When separated by the military forces they had reached no decision. Nor for the moment had the main body, the committees or the sub-committees. Only one person remained calm, friendly, unperturbed and victorious. Confiscation began to be discussed, and expropriation dimly threatened. Was the League of the World to be held up by one woman's whim? The architects continued to dispute. A design was at last selected. In every way no doubt perfect and worthy of universal applause. One point had, however, been neglected—a tiny point noted only when the guns had gone off, the speeches been made and the well-merited prize awarded. What was the point? Why merely that the building would not fit on the site of the Villa Lammermoor. 'The war is over,' a breathless delegate stammered as he rushed into the cool drawing-room. 'Oh,' said she, 'has there then been a war?'

There was a German, whose name I have forgotten, who wrote a novel in praise of Aristide Briand. As it was a just, generous and gentle book it has probably been burnt as a tribute to the new Germany. In that book it was suggested that Briand was the

sheep-dog of European peace—an old English sheep-dog with shaggy trousers and distant, desolate eyes. Its climax was in a *boîte-de-nuit* where some great German was by chance waiting to meet his French colleague. The band was at its demented bestial noise of lizards treading in the slime—a noise reflected in the eyes, the urgent fat hands and the deformed bodies of the dancers. Enter to them an all-but-naked negress, soft as night, cold as an asp and clutching at men's vitals with the tentacles of an orchid that is transformed to a squid at night. The room sways and rages at her—all desire, all panting lust. The band screams louder and louder. Out of the old marches begins to stream the smell of dim amoeba horribly stirring, and the negress grips her white man and holds him shuddering with desire to her black breasts. At which moment the curtains screening the fated room with its courtesans, its mirrors reflecting all that is most abominable in man and woman, divide. There shambles in an oldish man with trousers as vague as those of Grock, the Swiss clown. Nothing can prevent his hair from peering over his face in the hope of observing the conclusion of the thoughts that originate beneath it. Nor can anything prevent the odd square hands from appearing to assist the new-comer's motion of swimming through the air. So

shambling good-humouredly along he peers for his friend and colleague. The horrible noise of the band hushes, the shocking animal desires retreat, even the smells become tolerable, the mirrors cloud themselves, and the naked negress, relinquishing her man, shrinks through a door. The Orontes has ebbed with its foul and yellow flood. The Tiber has returned. Aristide Briand has come bringing civilization back.

There are others who take a different view of him. Fortunately I never understood politics, but I sometimes understood politicians. I did not understand Briand. I loved him. I think therefore that the German was right, and when he died I said so:

The Cyrano of peace to those hereafter  
worthy to follow him doth here remit  
the rapier of his gasconading laughter,  
and the panache of his heart-broken wit.

But he was not dead that day when I arrived late at lunch at the Villa Lammermoor. It was not my fault that I was late, but how was I to know that all the great of the earth were there, having preceded me, and that a high place had been most undeservedly reserved for the obscure late-comer? Briand, of course, sat on my hostess's right, but as I entered I was near enough to hear him say, 'Comme marque de confidence je vais avouer monsieur que le

Conseil est tombé d'accord.' 'Excellent, M. le Ministre, mais sur quoi?' 'Sur quoi? Ça je regrette, mais je ne sais pas.' His eyes remained perfectly still and sad as though they wondered a little at his mouth. They had through years of astonishment learned the trick of becoming motionless when Briand spoke, like wild animals when they hear a noise. 'Anything may happen,' Briand's eyes reflected. Anything generally did happen.

There were others of astonishing brilliance present. Indeed, when I dare to remember the names it seems to me (uneasily) as though I had been present at the Congress of Vienna. I am certain that I sat next to Metternich, and he, as we know, is the ghost of the ghost. Then too there was—I swear it—Bismarck, though he had, I confess, lost some of his bulk. But among all the bright spectres there brooded the eyes of Briand like those of Sunday in Mr. Chesterton's *The Man who was Thursday*. I never knew, I mean, whether he was God dressed as Falstaff or Falstaff dressed as God.

There is one tiny episode that remains to round it up. When he met me at Geneva, Briand was invariably kind. He remembered me because of a long story that I had poured out to him in breathless French the first time that I had been presented to him. I kept rushing up to dangers and barely avoiding them. He liked me, I suppose, for

the dangers I had passed, and I loved him because he pitied them. At least he recognized me at the Villa and after lunch came to speak to me. An indignant Foreign Secretary of a smaller State, seeking audience, turned sharply to some one standing two feet behind my back. 'Who is this unknown who takes precedence of all of us,' he asked, 'and then occupies Briand?' Aristide turned from me for a moment and took the speaker's hand cordially. They conversed in low tones for a few minutes. Presently Briand beckoned to me. 'Il pretend,' he said presenting me, 'qu'il est poète. C'est possible, même probable. Pour ma part, monsieur, je préfère de le regarder comme toujours inconnu. Vous vous rappelez, n'est-ce pas, *omne ignotum pro magnifico*.'

# XI

## A DIARY OF ARNOLD BENNETT

I READ the following entry in Arnold's Diaries, which Mr. Newman Flower has been editing with such discriminating fidelity: 'T. S. Eliot and Humbert Wolfe came to see me about "The Criterion". Their object was to get money. . . .' It reminded me vividly of the scene—the back drawing-room at No. 75 with the beautifully bound manuscripts of his novels behind his head, Arnold with his dark tuft, rising like Shagpat's Identical, myself dark and conciliatory, and T. S. Eliot, pale, cold and speaking slowly with his soft persuasive voice like a white kid glove. And I dare say we did want money. Why not? as Arnold himself would have said. The entry, however, reminded me of many other encounters either not recorded or omitted from the diaries. I'll try to recapture a few, I thought, and Arnold won't mind if I say that the only Five Towns man who ever justified the repeated description in the novels was the author. Wasn't he, for example, even called Enoch? And didn't he walk into the room like a Dowager Duchess who has left her fan at home?



Certainly he did. Very well, then, what can I remember?

At any rate I can't remember dates. I can't, like Arnold, begin an entry, 'Dec. 30th. On this day my count for the year is 3,000,000 words. Turbot for lunch and ill-cooked at that.' No, so far from remembering the day and the month, I find it difficult even to give the year in which I dined with him at the Thames Yacht Club before going to the Albert Hall to see the film of *Faust* for which he had written the titles. We were almost alone in the Club and I was much intimidated by its excessively maritime character. Arnold was in a dinner-jacket but I watched nervously for the gold braid and buttons of the ship's purser to creep ghostly along his coat. He is the purser, I kept miserably murmuring, and I haven't paid for my ticket. The waiters moved, as I thought, with a faint sea-roll. Aye, aye, sir, they appeared to pipe when asked to pass the mustard. There was, moreover, a solitary diner, so vast, so unyielding, so unfriendly that he might have been Lord Inchcape or the Inchcape Rock. He ought, I felt, to have been buoyed if not actually lighted. (But, I hasten to add, it was not Lord Inchcape. That great nobleman was probably at his country seat daffing with one or two other men of good will over a cup of champagne, with his cigar hellraking the spendthrift clerks

of the Civil Service who insisted on their £3 a week.)

In these circumstances I was not inordinately prepared for literary conversation. Nor was I in fact exposed to it. I had at some time previous to the dinner published a verse satire called 'News of the Devil'. Arnold did not disapprove of it, though he assured me—in that nautical setting—that I was merely 'rounding Cape Byron and might easily be wrecked before I opened my next port'. He had by heart two lines of my maxims for the Press:

There is one only truth, one only virtue:

Desert your friends before your friends desert you.

'It's funny, but if you meant Max, it isn't true. He doesn't desert his friends.' 'Who's Max?' I inquired ingenuously. Arnold balanced his eyes over his mouth, like one performing a trick with three billiard-balls. 'You be careful, young man,' he said finally. 'Not everything funny is a joke.' 'Is Max funny?' I persisted. 'Max,' said Arnold gravely, 'is Lord Beaverbrook. 'Oh, Beaverbrook,' I said. 'I thought that you meant Grock.' 'Grock's Christian name isn't Max,' said Arnold shortly. 'Well, but some other famous clown's was,' I answered. 'Now listen to me!' said Arnold. 'Lay off Beaverbrook, will you? It's not safe.' 'Queer,'

I said. 'I remember Neil Primrose saying the same. The friends,' I mused 'whom he never deserts seem to treat him rather as a timid owner would an Alsatian wolf-hound with a bad reputation.' 'What have you got against Beaverbrook?' said Arnold, 'the best friend a man ever had.' 'I? Nothing,' I answered. 'Did I say that he was the hero of my satire? Surely Northcliffe was much more likely to have conceived the idea of forming a merger of religions, and finding to his surprise and inconvenience that he had been self-elected God. I wonder in any case has God a Canadian accent?' 'Lord Beaverbrook hasn't,' said Arnold again shortly. 'Of course,' I said, 'I might have been thinking of Lord Rothermere.' 'Why?' asked he. 'Why indeed?' I answered. 'Why should any one?' 'Listen, my child,' said Arnold. 'You can only be a Don Quixote if you're a saint or mad. You stick to Sancho Panza: it's safer and more in character.' 'But,' I persisted flogging my donkey, 'you are a man of delicate perception, Arnold. What can you share with this man?' 'I will tell you what I share,' he said: 'life, abundant, large incessant life.' 'Skegness is so bracing,' I murmured. 'Listen,' said Arnold, pausing for effect: 'Beaverbrook is not like the East Wind. The East Wind is like Beaverbrook. Well, shall we go and see my picture?' We went and crouched in a box. At least I

crouched deeper and deeper as this horror like a wounded snake dragged its serpentine reels in a dance of death. Arnold watched me with increasing amusement. 'You wouldn't have done it for a thousand pounds, would you?' he murmured. I didn't answer. 'No, you wouldn't. They wouldn't have paid you twenty! And anyhow,' he said, 'it's a Primitive. Don't you see? We're still painting on wood with tempera. Give it—and me—time. And,' he said, 'there's no need to think that you're the only person alive with an artistic conscience.' 'I don't,' I said, hotly. 'Come and have supper,' he said. 'We're only young once.'

Harold Monro always warned me against success. He stood before the mirror in his little bedroom at the Poetry Bookshop with his face of a mild, intelligent horse looking at the reflection of another mild, intelligent horse. 'You don't run much risk of it,' he mused, 'to be fair to you. But if you see it coming, hide. Think,' he said, as he looked hopelessly for another tie, 'of Arnold Bennett. And,' he added, fixing me with a cold and vengeful eye, 'have you touched the card-index?' I had not touched the card-index. Harold first inscribed the names of MSS. submitted to him in a card-index, then lost the MSS. and last of all lost the card-index. 'You mind what I say,' he repeated, looking behind the bed. 'You beware of success.'

'I told Arnold,' I observed to his back, 'about our play.' The back straightened. 'What play?' 'You know—the one where we both say what comes in our heads for three hours and some one takes it down in shorthand.' 'Yes,' said Harold. 'What did Arnold say? Was he interested?' 'He said, "Be careful, it may be used against you."' 'What did I tell you,' said Harold. 'Why when I showed him "Waste Land" and asked him how he thought it compared with *Paradise Lost* he said that he hadn't read *Paradise Lost*.' 'It's all,' said Harold, 'the result of *The Old Wives' Tale* and *The Great Adventure*.' 'His not having read *Paradise Lost*?' I inquired. 'His not understanding Eliot,' said Harold. 'Yes,' said I mournfully, 'that is a high price to pay for success.' 'It is,' said Harold—'the highest.'

It was about a month later when I went in to No. 75 after dinner. I think Francis Birrell was there, because I seem to remember sharp criticism by him of the manners of a dog he had encountered in Paris. I am quite certain that Scott-Moncrieff was there. He wanted, for one thing, a suggestion for the translation of the title 'A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur', and violently trampled on each tentative suggestion. In addition he was not pleased with his landlady in the Italian town which he frequented. In general he could sympathize with her taste for

morphia. Name of a name—if a woman of sixty who weighed that number of cwts. (but only with her clothes on—to be fair) could not have her whims, who could? Yes, he was not one, he hoped, to give a counsel in the matter of the drug preferred. He had heard heroin well spoken of, and there were advocates of bhang. For his part he took none, never had. But if the old girl chose morphia, he knew better than to recommend, for example, cocaine. There was, he supposed, such a thing as liberty. But when, in a stupor, she refused him entrance to his room for two days and nights, the good lady was definitely becoming a problem. ‘Norman Douglas,’ I murmured, ‘*passim*.’ ‘And if I admire, like any man of taste and intelligence, that great author, do I, may I inquire, incur your censure? Possibly you know a better contemporary writer. Perhaps indeed you write better yourself.’ ‘Young men, young men, young men,’ Arnold intervened. ‘Young,’ fumed Scott-Moncrieff, ‘the man’s fifty if he’s a day. Or do you think,’ he turned to me, ‘that you would be admitted to the Ballila?’ ‘You are perfectly right about my age,’ I replied, ‘but you know the saying, those whom the gods love die young, those whom Norman Douglas dislikes are born old.’ ‘And why did he dislike you?’ inquired Scott-Moncrieff; ‘though, mind you,’ he added generously, ‘I do not

in the least blame him.' 'I don't blame him myself. Have you read "Together"?' 'It is not a favourite of mine,' said Scott-Moncrieff, 'but I have glanced through it.' 'There is a passage,' I said, 'in which Norman Douglas records how in search of a job during war-time he was introduced to the room of a certain *embusqué*. "A plump, though not ill-looking, young Hebrew was Mr. W." But it seemed that in spite of his plumpness, his comparative absence of ugliness and above all his Hebraic ancestry he could not "place" Mr. Douglas. The writer permitted himself to wonder why this Jewkin was not dispatched to the front.' 'And why weren't you?' asked Scott-Moncrieff. 'You were indispensable, I suppose.' 'No,' I said, 'merely indistinguishable.' 'And because of this incident wholly discreditable to yourself you venture to deprecate the author of "South Wind".' 'On the contrary, I adore him. I would almost as soon have written "South Wind" as Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind". I ventured indeed to dedicate a poem "The Locri Faun" to Mr. Norman Douglas without his permission "from his unknown admirer Mr. W." He never acknowledged it.' 'It was probably a very bad poem,' suggested Scott-Moncrieff. 'Certainly, I should think.' 'But it does not explain why you did not get him a job.' 'Well, no—as to that—there was this reason and that reason. It

had been indicated to me that at that particular moment in England he would not be a success.' 'Success,' shouted Scott-Moncrieff; 'do you think a man like Norman Douglas needs success? Why success has been chasing him all his life and, thank God! never overtaken him.' 'That reminds me, Arnold,' I said, turning to him, 'Harold Monro warned me against success. "If you see it coming, hide," he said. "Think of Arnold Bennett." Then he lost his card-index.' 'Just because Scott-Moncrieff has blacked your eye,' said Arnold plaintively, 'you jump out of the ring and hit the referee. It's not what Lord Lonsdale would like—no, nor Mr. Preston of Brighton.' 'I see all that,' I said; 'but are you a success? And ought we all to go and do otherwise?' 'Well?' chorused the other two, interested at last. Arnold Bennett looked at us gravely. 'Young men—yes I will call him young—are harsh,' he said, and at first as he said it he didn't look much older than the rest of us. He looked, I mean, bright and eager with that little movement of his head as of a great pugilist just dodging his opponent's right. Then suddenly he did not look like that at all. His face grew a little barren as though the light had been turned off an actor on the stage. 'Life,' he said, looking at us, 'life. I am over fifty. I am not a success. You remember Saki's motto? I will amend it. To



be over fifty is to have failed in life.' And yet a little later that evening I persuaded him to have a facsimile of his marvellous MS. of *The Old Wives' Tale* published. 'You have failed in life, Arnold,' I said, 'and yet when you wrote the book in that flawless script you had the immortal arrogance positively to illuminate the capitals at the beginning of each chapter. It makes me feel faintly sick.' 'Me too,' said Arnold. 'But eh, lad,' I murmured, 'aren't you a fair card.' 'I am that,' he may have reflected as he signed the contract for the publication of the facsimile.

I wrote a longish book of verse called *The Uncelestial City*, of which Arnold did not approve. He was at that time king-making and unmaking in the *Evening Standard*. He signed the deed for my deposition from the thronelet I had briefly occupied in an obscure corner of Rabesqurat's kingdom. Proudly, I suppose, I had assumed my circlet of asses' ears and apes' heads, and not very much did I at the moment like the wrench when Arnold pulled it off. He wrote to me before the review appeared an affectionate letter saying that he felt it his duty to review the book, adding 'Magnus amicus Humbert, major veritas.' The review, following on a friendly little notice by Mr. Harold Nicholson beginning, 'This silly little book', naturally damaged the book and hurt the author.

There are writers who tell you that they do not read their reviews, there are others who prefer bad notices to good. Such men are either liars or more than mortal. In this matter at least I am neither one nor the other. I wrote to Arnold, approving his literary integrity but indicating only too plainly that I wished that he hadn't used it at my expense. We exchanged several letters of increasing complexity and dignity. We did not meet for several months. He was busy and I was, I imagine, sulking. Then suddenly I heard of his illness. Like the rest of the world, I took it to be a bad attack of influenza, but I began to worry at its prolongation. Finally I plucked up courage and went round to see. When I went in the butler asked me if I would mind washing my hands in antiseptic. I felt suddenly cold. Antiseptic, what, why? At the very far end of an interminable passage I heard a door open, and I heard, faint, illegible and terribly changed, a voice that I had known whisper 'Who is it?' 'It's I, Arnold,' I cried, but the door closed. It never opened again for me.

## XII

### THE THREE INTERVIEWS OF GEORGE MOORE

NOT only is this not a detective-story, but it is actually a lie. There were in fact only two interviews. The third interview, however, which never took place, was the most important, and not the least important point was that it didn't take place. Having said so much it might perhaps be desired that I should elaborate the interviews. Whether it is desired or not, I will.

George Moore had at some period unknown written a play on the Bacon-Shakespeare theme called *The Making of an Immortal*. On his own showing, proud though he was to believe himself a dramatist of the first order, he had tossed it on one side as an inconsiderable trifle. He had read it one evening at Tonks' house, and it had so far pleased the audience that Edmund Gosse had asked for the manuscript. Why he had asked for it does not appear, as at no time in his long literary career (as far as I know) did he breathe to the world his knowledge of the play's existence. Certainly it could not have been

a desire to smother the play, because even Gosse must have known that it was a bad play. It may simply have been that he had a vacancy on the shelf where he kept the manuscripts that obsequious authors presented to the head of the profession. In any case, despite Gosse's request the play would, says George Moore, have mouldered in a drawer had not Mr. James Raye Wells—a young American publisher—ferreted it out. Wells was pressing George Moore for something that the great printer—Bruce Rogers—might print and decorate. 'I've nothing,' he said, 'nothing at all—unless it be a bit of a thing that Miss Kingdom keeps at the back-end of the drawer. It is nothing at all but a play.' 'A play!' James Wells was all excitement as (perhaps) George Moore had intended. 'What sort of a play?' 'It shows Shakespeare as the stupid man he was, and taking the credit of Bacon's work for a political reason. There is Burbage and all the little eyasses. And, of course, Herself comes in like the Queen of Spades that she was. A pretty thing, I'd say. For Tonks and Gosse both liked it well enough.' 'It shall be bound,' said Wells, 'and printed like all the courtiers of Queen Elizabeth.' 'And paid for in ducats,' I interposed. 'You shall make your own terms, Mr. Moore,' said James Wells a little rashly. 'Money,' said George Moore. 'It would be a queer thing

if money came in the way of it. It's not printed but acted I'd wish to have it. But to say actors, Mr. Wells, is to speak of the Ten Tribes.' 'There were Twelve,' I said, 'and two lost. But perhaps you were thinking of the Ten Plagues.' 'Well, ten or twelve, they're locusts for stripping your very thought from the words. I didn't blame them in Dublin so much with poor Edward's play. For they had the fear of the Black priests over them. But what was to prevent them in London from acting *The Coming of Gabrielle* as though it were a play and not words running from sense, like refugees escaping from a bombardment? After this lapse of time I haven't in mind who were the fellows who had the play destroyed, but I wouldn't have the like of them for *The Making of an Immortal*.' 'I'm afraid that I'm only a publisher, Mr. Moore, not a producer. If I had a theatre you should choose your own actors from the two sides of the Atlantic.' 'There are none to choose,' said George sombrely.

Nevertheless his heart was set on one successful play. From his studio days in Paris he had dreamed of this. His first return to England had been in the hope of a dramatic stroke. He had gone to Dublin not least to help in the foundation of a national theatre—which, once founded, left him an unconsidered figure in the wings.

And there had been the failure of *The Coming of Gabrielle* on the London stage. Was it too late even now in the twilight of his life, in failing health, to have the one triumph that had been denied him? Perhaps *The Making of an Immortal* was too slight. But what of *The Essenes*—the play refashioned from *The Apostle*—that annexe to *The Brook Kerith*? For here indeed the two streams of his creative emotion met and made one great river, like the White and Black Lutschine making one strong glacier flood under the bridge of the little hotel 'Zum Bären'.

George Moore's longing for success on the stage was deep and native in his blood. But no less strong was his passionate adhesion to the story of the Gospels. Like many professed unbelievers the measure of his attraction to what he denied was the vehemence of the denial. 'Why,' as he often said, 'should we trouble ourselves with the Virgin Mary when we have Venus?' But he meant it not at all. The Virgin Mary shook him to the core of his being, as he admits in *Hail and Farewell*. He records in a most moving passage how he quarrelled with his brother because the money he had contributed to the household expenditure had been used for a boy's Catholic education. He was in a frenzy. He could not sleep. He fled the house and his brother's sight. So much

did that pale Virgin disturb the man who recommended the Paphian as her antidote or anodyne.

It was those powerful hands that drew him to the Gospel story and to his beautiful denial of it in *The Brook Kerith*. He denied Jesus the Messiah and lifted Him down from the Cross not the Saviour but a man in urgent need of Salvation. But the arms that lifted Him down were unexpectedly gentle. In his own despite George Moore seemed almost to affirm when he most urgently denied. Nowhere in the narrative is this conflict between the two George Moores more marked than in the account of the meeting between Jesus the Shepherd of the Essenes and Paul, who preached the risen Christ. It is night in the monastery. One beats suddenly on the great door. 'Thieves,' cry the timid monks one to another. 'Let us not open.' 'Nay,' says the Shepherd, home from the hill. 'Maybe a wanderer and in peril. We must open.' The monks cower as Jesus, tall though a little bent with His years, strides and throws back the bar. The darkness pours in like a rush of black water, and in the dark a face anguished, driven, and yet a face of power. 'Let me in,' this one cries to Jesus the Shepherd. 'I am Paul—a fugitive and in danger of my life. But,' says he, looking into the calm eyes of the Shepherd, 'I bring the life eternal.'

It is not given to imagine a greater conflict. Lear in the storm, agonizing Samson, Laocoön in the throes—all fade beside this universal opposition. But there was a dual conflict. In the front of the canvas were Paul and Jesus, but behind was George Moore—the disbeliever—at bitter odds with his disbelief. It was good, perhaps, for his soul, but, alas! it was not good for his art.

So *The Passing of the Essenes* was remodelled out of *The Apostle*, an earlier, and, in George Moore's view, an unsuccessful play. A life's devotion to the theatre here mixed with that other strange passion of the *Chrétien malgré lui*. Here George Moore was to be justified of his faith in his dramatic powers and his unfaith in God. He was stricken ill. He lay, so it seemed to his friends, at the point of death in the quiet room in Portland Place to which his 'dear lady of dreams, dear Lady Cunard' had conveyed him. Before death came, she thought, his last desire should be granted. As his journey-money to heaven he should pay, or she would pay for him, the two obols of the Essenes. It should be performed, and not only performed. It should crack the welkin. If it were the last word he should hear, then as the last he should hear the deep bell-mouthed cry of an audience swept up to the heights. 'Author,' they should cry in his ear, as all voices died, 'Author, Author!'



With supernatural energy all was arranged. The Arts Club Theatre was available, a brilliant cast secured, music of the first order provided and the benevolent attention of all the leading critics engaged. The Press, with its huge indifference to everything but news, permitted itself to be persuaded that the last dramatic work of an aged and dying author partook of that character. Society, similarly concerned neither with good nor evil but only with sensation, became aware of a new diversion. George Moore had written two or three of the greatest prose-books in the English language. That did not, in the view of the Press and Society, entitle him to particular notice. But let him be old, let him be on the verge of the grave, let his last work, however unworthy of him and of art, be produced in a sort of race with death, and both these sources of power became interested. No man or event can be of importance to the Press unless he or it can be presented in head-lines, to Society unless he and it are admirable for the wrong reason. Mr. George Moore on his pseudo-death-bed satisfied Press and Society.

The result was a triumphant success for *The Passing of the Essenes*. The play, like all George Moore's plays, was valueless as a play. This did not modify the enthusiasm of those who came to behold a feat rather than drama. Even as the audience were

watching, and the critics scribbling, the final Critic might perhaps be appraising the soul of the author. It was a solemn moment. It did not have the full ecstasy of a brutal murder-trial nor the all-shattering emotion of the arrival of some imbecile actress who had been hailed as a vedette of the films. It was, however, something. The Press scavenged industriously, and Society was not displeased.

But Mr. George Moore, according to his habit, had cheated both death and the scavengers. On the morning after the triumph he was sufficiently well to sit up and enjoy the perusal of the papers. He was self-possessed enough to realize the value of praise that bore no relation to the fact, but he was, after all, a man. For the moment he topped the bill of letters. Hardy, his lifelong enemy, was a pricked bubble. Kipling, Galsworthy, Shaw, Wells and Bennett all stood on the one side. The stage was cleared, the limelight was directed on one point, the immense audience waited.

The curtain rose and revealed Mr. George Moore sitting up in bed. His straight white hair was lankly brushed across the skull, the slightly plump cheeks had not wholly lost their irrelevant pink, and the glacial blue of the eyes in a curious way disinfected the hysteria which surrounded him. Nevertheless a great silence was imposed while duly

selected reporters, with their heads suitably in the dust, ventured to address questions to the greatest of writers at the greatest moment—as they saw it—of his life. Two answers to two leading questions above all crashed on the waiting ear-drums of the world. ‘What,’ said one reporter, ‘do you think of modern woman?’ ‘I don’t like,’ said the oracle to England—‘I don’t like the way they don’t wear corsets. There’s no place to rest your arm.’ ‘What do you think of contemporary English writers?’ inquired a second. ‘There are none,’ replied Mr. George Moore. He had made a full and characteristic use of his moment. Hysteria retired baffled, and George Moore wondered, or pretended to wonder. ‘They won’t give me the O. M., Humbert,’ he said. ‘I’m not wanting it. But why?’ Why, indeed!

The second interview arose in the course of the writing of *Aphrodite in Aulis*. I have recorded elsewhere how he had proposed to call the book ‘The fair Rump of Aphrodite’. He was only dissuaded on the curious ground that a title should not begin with four monosyllables—an argument that I advanced in despair when all others had failed. The book progressed, as all George Moore’s work progressed, very slowly, with every word considered, reconsidered, and accepted with the same care that St. Peter addresses to the admission of souls to heaven.

Like Anatole France, when a chapter was finished, George Moore went back and first rejected all adjectives and adverbs, then mused upon nouns and verbs, and finally threw the chapter away and started again. This is a possible method with all life before one. It is a source of anxiety both to the author and his friends when his future is severely limited. Nevertheless, George Moore was persuaded that time and the art of the surgeon would give him the time that he needed. He was right. It is true that the first published version of the last chapter did not please him. It is equally true that he put off his return to the nursing-home for three weeks while, sustained only by literary integrity, he beat pain and finished his chapter.

So much for the first. The second interview relates to an earlier stage of the book. It happened that I was in Geneva upon business connected with the International Labour Office. It was an evening in June, and I was sitting, as was my habit, on one of the benches round the great tree in the middle of the Cour de St. Pierre. The music-box tinkle of the cathedral bells had but lately ceased to refresh the somnolent air. The high houses in the Place de la Taconnerie nodded in the slumber in which they have indulged any time these last two hundred years. On the lower side of the

slanting square over the cobbles the houses that blocked the view of the lake drew their Calvinistic brows together. 'Consider,' they indicated, 'your latter end,' but one was driven to consider their latter end, balanced like a man sitting on a tight-rope with their amiable backs to the drop to the water. It was a place suitable for reflection and for calm. Nevertheless I read an English newspaper.

It was recorded in the columns of this cemetery for dead ideas and buried truths that an interview had been accorded by George Moore 'who,' the readers of the journal were prompted, 'will be remembered as the author of *The Passing of the Essenes*—the play at whose first night Royalty was present.' The interview with the celebrity, thus appropriately recalled to the attention of the public, related to the progress of *Aphrodite*. Mr. Moore indicated that his method was one of constant and pitiless rejection. For example, the whole of the first version had been thrown on the scrap-heap. 'But,' said the breathless young man, stricken with awe at this magnificent carelessness, 'where is the MS.? It must be priceless.' 'I don't know,' said Mr. Moore. 'I expect that Miss Kingdom burned it.' You could see from the disturbance in the syntax, noticeable even in this writer's style, that the young man had almost sobbed.

While I read this a little wind stirred the leaves of the great beech-tree. The church of John Calvin looked at me like a gaunt charwoman with half a mind to mop me up. Nor did the cathedral altogether excuse my lack of gravity. A little abashed, I made for the steps called 'Les Degrés de Poules', and descended suddenly to the level of the lake. Musingly I crossed the bridge to the Hôtel des Bergues. I lingered for a moment, enchanted as always by the lucid green leap of the Rhone on its bridal journey to the longed-for rendezvous with the distant sea. I tore myself from that contemplation with a little sigh. 'Ah, well,' I thought, 'if he is anxious as to the whereabouts of the MS. of the first version, I can put his fears at rest.' Before I dressed I sat at my window and scribbled a note on the Bergues's thin paper to 121 Ebury Street. 'If you are really worried,' I wrote, 'as to the whereabouts of the first version of *Aphrodite*, dismiss your worry. Buy a copy of . . . . [an American monthly journal]. You will find that it is being published serially in its columns.'

The third interview, as I have already indicated, was imaginary. It related to some difficulty in providing a suitable horse for the statue of the late Field-Marshal Lord Haig. It appeared that England was much excited in the matter. In spite of much factual

evidence to the contrary, there was a widespread impression that this had been a considerable soldier, whose tenacity had contributed largely to what was still regarded as a victory. It was difficult, in fact, to isolate those feats of arms in which the Field-Marshal had personally triumphed. This, however, was not important. *Vox populi, vox dei* and *victrix causa deis placuit*. There had, the people were assured, been a conquest. Lord Haig had been in a high degree associated with that conquest. They were the gods. He pleased them.

He pleased them and he had died. It was right that his memory should be traditionally honoured with one of those large and leaden statues which, spread, as they are, in the avenues of all cities, bear mute testimony to the fact that in the eyes of men the arts of war still far outshine the arts of peace. It was necessary to provide the Field-Marshal with a horse that should hugely ramp, or, alternatively, with one in quiet repose suitable to majestic dominance over contrary events. A sculptor was chosen. He was set to work. He exposed, as it were, a first draft of the projected masterpiece. An unexpected storm beat about his ears. Little objection was taken in artistic circles since (to be frank) this particular adventure hardly intruded upon their activities. Nor did the Stock Exchange and the eminent soldiers and admirals,

whose opinion was naturally invited, animadvert unfavourably upon the figure of the Field-Marshal. A nation of sportsmen all, even those who had never seen a horse's hoof lifted in anger, from every point of view fell upon the animal and its appointments. They were able to show by measurements, by photographs, by reference to the stud-book, by recollections of Durbars in India, and by accidents that happened in the 'nineties to the winner of the St. Leger that this horse was not a charger fit to carry a hero, or, indeed, to carry any one at all. The sculptor was in acute distress, and not unnaturally, since the more patriotic sections of the Press hammered him with the most divergent, if eager, advice. Let an Australian be summoned or a riding-master, or one who had ridden to hounds for fifty years without ever losing a horse. Above all, let a substitute be found for this miserable who had outraged the tenderest feelings of Great Britain by misrepresenting not only a horse but this particular horse. Finally, Lady Haig herself was invoked, and when there were rumours that she was to cross to France with the Field-Marshal's riding equipment, the nation breathed again.

It was at the height of this grave affair that I had occasion to call upon George Moore in Ebury Street. I found him in a state of unusual emotion. He was courteous



enough, as always, not to interrupt my gossip of books and writers, but his mind was plainly elsewhere. He leaned back with his odd air of an abbot who had just laid aside his cowl, and said, 'I wish they'd interview me about the statue.' 'The statue,' I inquired. 'What statue?' He regarded me with the faint pity that I too often inspired. 'Here's a story that all Paris would have given its ears for, and you asking what statue. Never was such a tale since they stole the bronze horse from the boulevards.' I asked what that tale might be, but he brushed it on one side. 'What a joy it would be to an editor to have this tale properly told—with quiet detail and elaboration. A man could take a couple of pages each on the top-boots, the make of the spurs, the length and shape of the stirrups, and the controversies about the saddle. I imagine how the whole Philistinism of a people would be exposed with soft feathered malice. They would laugh from John o'Groats to Land's End. But you must find me an editor who deserves a good turn, and an interviewer,' he said, regarding me frostily, 'who can write.' I put this attack on my capacity on one side. I was too alarmed to consider my own feelings. It seemed that this was not a jest but a serious project. I was aghast. 'But,' I cried in an ecstasy of horror, 'do you realize that it is Field-Marshal Lord

Haig who is in question—the popular idol—the man who either lost or found the war, I forget which, and one universally endeared by his recent death, by his great sweetness of disposition and by his heroic appearance? For God's sake spare yourself this.' George Moore looked at me with interest. 'Do you share their feelings?' he inquired. 'Why, no,' I said, 'but——' 'You're afraid, like the rest, and the greatest joke that would shake the knees of the gods to go a-begging! Is it mad you are?' 'I think of the English character,' I said. 'I have spent my life,' said George Moore, 'in not thinking of it.'

### XIII

ALBERT *ET* ARTHUR

THERE were, no doubt, worse places in the summer of 1921 than the Adlon Hotel in the Unter den Linden, but not, I think, many. It was the last citadel of a lost cause, but it was a cinematograph-producer's idea of a lost citadel. Everywhere in the elaborate bar, in the immense dining-room, in the mahogany-panelled bedrooms you were aware of the prevalent and impossible loyalty. But always there was a sense of previous arrangement. That elegant young ex-officer scowled according to orders at 10.30 precisely, and then slipped off his sword and his unfamiliar clothes and went back to his Bank. The Baltic baron in the dining-room noisily devoured his *Ersatz Sauerkraut* and swallowed his *Ersatz* beakers of beer under the camera. The hauteur of the waiters to all but the old régime was carefully practised. The bust of the Kaiser in the Hall and the pre-war German flag flown from the peak were properties. When this particular play was over the stage could be cleared and the Adlon devote itself to its business of being an hotel. But at the

moment, when it required the services of a group of higher mathematicians and astronomers to keep pace with the fluctuating price of rooms, the hotel might represent Germany weeping for her Kaiser.

So much for the façade. Withindoors in the two or three floors of suites that his activities entailed, Hugo Stinnes was preparing the revolution, constantly exchanging new companies for old and opening a whole series of enchanted caves into which middle-class Germany precipitated itself. They didn't, however, find a genie to roll back the stone. Adolph Hitler was not yet. There was only the bull-necked, flat-headed hulk who thrust Mr. E. L. Poulton on the one side when they were waiting for their coats at the cloak-room. Mr. Poulton did not look like a Labour leader. He looked (as indeed as he was) a gentle, kindly and inoffensive person, even if he had from the Germans' point of view the disadvantage of being English. This gentle appearance probably provoked the ruffianly rudeness. Mr. Poulton was over sixty, his aggressor in the early fifties. He stamped heavily out, Nordic and bestial to his gross finger-tips. Mr. Poulton went pale for an instant. He had not been struck, but he had been violently hustled. 'What was that?' he said at last. 'Oh, that,' said I, 'that was and is Germany.'

There was, though, much excuse for German

bitterness. All the way in the train from Berlin to Warnemünde it was only possible to get coffee made of some sort of native bean, and cherries. In the first-class carriages the upholstery was worn and the springs broken. The permanent way was jerky, and all stations were in want both of paint and of repairs. The fir-trees in their great clumps murmured together like cattle waiting for a storm. We hailed with extreme relief the Danish steamer that was to carry us over to Gjedsted. Curious that the labourers on the wharves at Warnemünde should view with apparent unconcern the spectacle of passengers eating lavishly, and eating at their starved will. In the dining-room the huge array of Scandinavian hors-d'œuvre was piled, it seemed, to the ceiling, and there was enough Schnapps, beer, and wine to float the vessel. The porters, immediate spectators of this feasting, regarded it with no apparent emotion. It may be they were too dejected to notice anything. It may more probably have been that they concealed their feelings, and that it was revealed only in sudden levin-flashes such as manifested themselves when the thunderous brows of Mr. Poulton's German crashed.

These observations, moving as they were at the moment, became unimportant as a member of the International Labour Office

staff drew my attention to a square, plump man with a square, plump beard. He was standing firmly planted in the middle of the deck, at once at home and alien, that distinguishing trait of the travelling Frenchman. He had not in the least varied his clothes. He might have just been emerging from his bureau. In fact he was just emerging thence, as, according to his custom, he had been dictating to his typist all the way from Berlin to the coast. He was gently caressing his beard and watching the mast of the vessel with speculative eyes. 'That's Albert Thomas,' said my friend. 'Come, let me introduce you.' I was introduced and found him talking affably to M. Lombardi, whom I took to be an Italian delegate, so intimately civil were the two. So much so that for two days I felt that I had accomplished rather a diplomatic stroke for Great Britain by attracting M. Lombardi's apparently favourable notice. It was typical of the real democracy, which has incorrigibly remained alive in France, that M. Lombardi was in fact the very efficient porter of the I.L.O. Albert turned from his rapid conversation with Lombardi to tap me genially on the shoulder. 'Ça vous conviendra,' he said, instantly subduing my affection with his warm blunt voice and his warm blunt hands. 'Mais regardez seulement.' I regarded as desired. The object of

interest was the mast, on the top of which a group of white-breasted gulls were playing king of the castle. One after another had a moment's dizzy supremacy only to be pecked or swept off by his winged successor. 'It is,' said Albert in his slow English, 'it is what you call the Winged Victory. It does not, you see, last very long. But the gulls think it worth while.' 'Perhaps,' I suggested, 'because they are gulls.' 'And we?' he said. 'What are we?' He left me to go to his cabin. 'It is the Eight Hours' Convention with which I occupy myself—for about seventeen hours' work a day,' he threw, twinkling, over his shoulder.

The beginning of Denmark with its red sand and its crowd of fir-trees running down to the waves, like South Sea Islanders to welcome the incoming steamer, was also for me the beginning of Arthur Fontaine. He was Chairman of the Governing Body, and therefore the chief of those in the special train speeding through the nightingale-haunted forests. Again, as an instance of that charming equality, I found myself by his side in the corridor, the welcome recipient of his confidences. If in a moment of anger I had described the creature in the Adlon as Germany I could at any moment and in every emotion describe Arthur Fontaine as France. Not, of course, the Gallic France of the Victorian imagination (what an

unpleasant sniggering schoolboy that imagination was!), nor yet that strange much-enduring country of shabby blue uniforms, nor at all the France of La Bohême or of Proust. Indeed, Arthur Fontaine with his broad chest, his ample Barbarossa beard, his great forehead and his soft and subtle voice might have been the anti-Proust. Or more positively he was a picture of a Frenchman by one of his beloved post-Impressionists. He would himself have preferred Carrière, who did paint him with his daughter in one of his cloudy masterpieces. Actually Manet's would have been the right brush. There would be that sense of poise, of balanced weight, of truth, and somewhere would be in the picture the Southern sun, so strong that you would guess at the mimosa and the oranges. 'The light you see is the life of the picture.' The picture of Arthur Fontaine would be full of light.

There are three castles in Denmark—Kronborg, Fredensborg and Elsinore. Each has its peculiar virtue and glory—Kronborg of the rose-red city set in a lily-pond, Fredensborg of doves all day long about the white walls on a hill, and Elsinore of that Prince Hamlet whom an Englishman made heir-apparent of Elysium. Through all these three splendours for me like an innocent Macbeth and his consort stalk the beloved figures of Albert and Arthur. For it was at



Fredensborg, between the voices of the doves, that I first heard a great orator greatly surpassing himself. The long tables had been set in one of the golden ball-rooms. A window was open so that one could look down one of the steep avenues to the quiet waters of the Sound. Much had been eaten and much drunk. A number of most amiable Danes had threatened the French tongue with an extinction from which it had been rescued by the coolly precise perfection of Arthur's intervention. His French was like an armful of lilies tossed carelessly into a craft of Vikings with their fierce forked beards in the wind. Lilies—but no more—and then Albert had risen. The Vikings leaned back to the oar. This, it seemed, was a voice that they knew. He stood in the sunlight a squat, ungracious figure, absurdly clothed and with an apparently unmanageable beard. Moreover, he spoke swiftly a tongue that for the most part went crying past the ears of the rowers like the desperate language of the gulls. Nevertheless, as he spoke they began to shift on the rowers' seats, and lay a hand on the oars. What had happened to the little black-coated man? He was not there at all. In his place there was an indistinguishable figure with two hands on the heart-strings. Of what was he speaking? Of what was it told? Who could answer, since for most it was the sound and

not the meaning of the words that conquered. Perhaps in their fierce blood magic was at work. Such storm-enchanted sounds had called the big ships to the deep water and the distant arms of death in battle. Now as clear, as terrible that voice eddied, calling them to the dreadful agonies of peace, the supreme renunciation of the will to slay. Not only has peace its victories no less renowned than war, but no less bloody, no less to be bought with wounds, with loss of all that a man cares for, with death, said the lovely, the ineluctable voice. There, out there, beyond the doves, over the blue waters of the Sound, in the distance of the untrodden precipices, peace, perilous, impossible, that passes understanding. 'Peace, peace, peace,' cried the voice and was still. In every man's heart the long ships had sailed already.

So that Albert could for a moment dispossess William Shakespeare even when I stood on the terrace of Elsinore, listening in vain for the challenge of the sentry. I did not stand there alone. A variety of beards wagged all in a wandering breeze. Gaily did the old sea-captain from Toulon—who translated French into English, blissfully ignorant of both languages—gaily, I say, did he argue the demerits of Schnapps as compared with Marc de Bourgoyne. 'That,' he was saying to three characters out of one of the novels in Mr. Le Queux's earlier (and more

cosmopolitan) manner, 'that is not to be believed how little force has this Schnapps. I am not a man to boast himself, but, figure to yourself, before interpreting yesterday I drank a tumbler. Was any difference remarked?' 'None,' said Albert, appearing at the moment. 'Indeed,' he continued reflectively, 'it sometimes seems to me that nothing makes any difference to your interpretation, neither what you have drunk nor what the orator says. It is perhaps your speciality.' He passed on to appease the wounded feelings of a delegate who had (by error) been put next to a typist at dinner. 'They are ambitious, our typists,' he began as he passed out of earshot. But the sea-captain was hurt in a vital point. He bellowed like a sea-calf to his companions. He frightened the ghost of Hamlet's father a thousand leagues across the sea. He would not be comforted till the reassuring figure of Arthur appeared softly treading. 'Monsieur le President,' cried the outraged sea-creature, 'he has said that my interpretations are inexact. Much I can endure because I love him, but this never.' 'But,' said Arthur, 'when one considers what is often said, I ask myself how far exactitude in translation is either necessary or indeed desirable?' The sea-captain was only in part appeased. 'Am I then actually inaccurate?' he demanded. 'I who have eighteen times navigated the China sea without

mishap and once with a faulty chart.' 'You must,' said Arthur, 'tell me more of that, and here, by chance, is the Chinese delegate. We were, Monsieur, as it happens discussing the delights of sailing in your waters. This is M. Lemorier; you should have much in common.' The Chinaman stroked the three hairs that comprised his beard. 'It is possible,' he said to M. Fontaine's retreating back.

Stockholm is not the Venice of the North. On the contrary, Venice is the Stockholm of the South. Because Stockholm, intersected by its canals, stands up against the sky, firm, gallant, adventurous as did the Venezia Benedetta of the first Doge. How long ago was the Place of St. Mark built, through how many centuries has it gathered at the one time beauty, splendour and decay? And who can rebuild the fallen Campanile except in the shape of a red, high-shouldered ghost? But in Stockholm it was only yesterday that the Town Hall, braced as a flag in the wind, crowned its peninsula, and at every corner a new Palazzo takes the air, whose walls do not peel, whose long rooms do not hoard memories cold and wet as the brickwork of a disused well. It was midsummer, which implied that nobody in the capital of Sweden slept. It was indeed difficult for a modest stranger to conjecture the purpose which beds served. The difficult episode of the cream-cake at the Slot was over. Oh, nothing

of great importance except that owing to certain differences in height between the King of that country and the British delegate, the monarch had unfortunately devoted his attention to one of the minor characters in the background. Faint sounds from near the ground had presumably not reached those highly-placed ears. Representations duly made induced the early return of Royalty to repair the error. The erring subordinate had one hand and his mouth full of a green-coated cake but of an excellence! Down the long, gilded corridors like a figure in a ballet came the brilliant figure of the King. The obscure one continued to munch, certain that he would be ignored. Unhappily Majesty had been misinformed. Again he swept up to the usurper and positively grasped his hand. Thus the King was all but enabled to share—and to carry off—adhering to his palm a piece of that cream-cake which was in process of consumption. In vain did the offender seek to articulate between lumps of sugar-icing. He all but fainted with horror. The royal suite, however, noticed nothing. They ascribed his behaviour to natural awe. His attitude of one about to choke may even have excited sympathetic notice. This sympathy, however, was not general in the British delegation.

There is an island among the thousand in the Mäleren peninsula. For some strange

and lovely reason it is called Elba. The sea gropes with its long arm how many miles I cannot guess, but they seem, as Robert Louis Stevenson says, as long as the years. The midnight sky in these latitudes is of a pearl-grey, the exact colour of the inside of the shell. The sun for less than an hour dips below the horizon, not so much sinking as diving, to come up again shaking the night in silver bubbles from his resurrected hair. The water is glass-cold as it quietly laps the island shores. Hither in the hot months a few shallops resort, bringing their freight of tow-haired girls and their tall grenadiers. There are in the middle of the islet, a hundred feet up, a restaurant and a dancing-floor. Here about their tables gathered the Geneva worthies, guests that night of some great Swedish manufacturing concern. There were all sorts of men at that dinner—minor Ambassadors, conscientious officials of all countries (all officials, until actually found out, are *ex hypothesi* conscientious: nothing else could explain their being officials), lawyers representing the massed, though physically absent, intelligence of employers, and Labour leaders with their phantom armies behind them, glittering, like unshed tears, on the eyelids of night. In addition, however, there were Arthur and Albert—and a mist.

There had been speeches. The altogether

admirable host looked for a short time like Sir Eric Geddes, and then, realizing that this was after all a social occasion, resumed a human appearance. He made his speech in English with that most endearing tang which suggests *Moby Dick*. 'She Blows,' you could almost hear and the ring of steel as the harpoons were swung into position. Followed in the best of tempers a Northern Labour leader, in face and figure very like a wise ox. His speech was short but full of meat. 'I have dined well, drunk well, and have not paid a stiver. So far as I am concerned the Social Revolution is achieved.' Thereafter the mist began to obscure the lines of the lake. We sat on that queer eminence like Northern gods before the world. We were supping in Valhalla in great content. Somewhere at our feet the bridge Bifröst stretched, impossibly connecting us with the world, No foot of the heroes rang upon its rainbow arch. It was so still that you could almost hear the great snake Jörmungand stir in his sleep, as he looped his vast scales tighter round the world.

One of the gods—Odin perhaps—was speaking. The light fell on his broad beard, on the gentle eminence of his gestures. Here was quiet, he said, and in the quiet time to reflect on the tasks of rectification and healing. The season of the thunderbolts was

over. The half-gods of war were gone and, as Emerson says:

heartily know  
When the half-gods go  
The gods, the gods return.

There was silence as he took his place. Suddenly on the path beneath us there was the sound of running feet. A girl, dew-spangled as a spider's web, came into the tiny circle of light and paused there like Psyche listening for the god's beloved feet. Presently she heard his step. Light as the mist into which she melted she sprang forward. All gazed; and now, as in the spot-light of the stage, the pursuer vaulted on with the great bound of the immortal Njinsky in 'The Spectre of the Rose.' Like Discobolus, he leaned forward in the act to throw, the first lines of his beautiful adolescence as decisive as the last lines of a sonnet. He too heard and, laughing aloud, followed the nymph in flight.

Albert arose. 'Behold,' he said, looking into the misty night, 'our task—to make the world safe for such. That is the everlasting movement of life—saying, "Yes, oh yes." Behind us is the eternal stagnation of death or war, muttering, as it crashes the axe, "No, no, no." We will say "yes" for them and for all like them hereafter. I give you the toast of "yes".' 'Coupled,' cried someone,



'with the name of Albert Thomas.' We rose and drank to 'yes' coupled with the name of Albert Thomas.

The mist shifted an instant, then poured down again. Presently we could scarcely see one another's faces.

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